Turkish foreign policy vis-à-vis Iran, 1979-2010
An examination of ideological, economic, and security interests

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by
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Introduction

Turkey’s relations with Iran have experienced substantial fluctuations since the early days of the Turkish Republic when both countries were key U.S. allies in the region and beneficiaries of vast U.S. military aid. Turkey’s policies towards Iran reflect the shifting imperatives of a volatile domestic and regional landscape, and as such, present an area that should be examined in greater detail. This research project will attempt to answer the question of whether there indeed is a hierarchy of interests that governs Turkey’s foreign policy vis-à-vis Iran. In other words, the factors driving Turkey’s foreign policy towards Iran will be used as a case to test the “hierarchy of interests” proposition, as stated by Michael Desch.

To do so, the research will be organized into three time periods: 1979-1990, 1991-1999, and 2000-2010—as well as into categories of security, economy, and ideology. This will not only allow for each of the factors to be assessed separately within their time frame, but also will provide a structural framework to see how the variables being tested have played out within each individual context. Answering this research question is important in comprehending how a nation, which holds a critical position as a rising Muslim country, NATO ally, and EU candidate, devises its foreign policy. The findings of this research may serve as a foundation to predicting Turkey’s future actions. In addition, it has potential to contribute to the debate on whether security still serves as the most determinant interest of a state.

Given the shifting nature of the Middle East, and the Sunni-Shia sectarian conflict ignited decades ago and the intra-Sunni cold war between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt on one side and Qatar and Turkey on the other, understanding the nature of Turkey’s relations and interests with regard to Iran is key to understanding present and future power dynamics in the region. This introduction will provide a short literature review, a discussion of the key concepts, a description
of the theoretical framework, and a discussion of the evidence that will be used, in this particular order.

**Literature Review**

The literature on Turkish foreign policy has developed and transformed considerably since the 1980s. In this section, significant topics of discussion concerning each period will be underlined and examples will be given, but the topics will not be discussed in full length. Much of the literature on Turkey’s foreign policy in the 1980s has to do with Turkey’s fallout with the European Community due to the military coup and Turkey’s subsequent expansion to new markets in the Middle East. For example, Elliot Hentov in his piece on Turkey’s role in the Iran-Iraq war “The Ostensible Silent Victor?” sees Turkey’s increased trade ties with Muslim countries as a considerable shift; he finds the fact that the staunchly secular (Kemalist) military, which conducted the coup to protect the nation from extreme left and right ideologies, allowed the establishment of close economic ties with countries like Pakistan and Iran, to be striking. Nevertheless, many are in agreement that this shift portrays the military’s pragmatist re-orientation. The policies pursued in this period are labeled broadly by academics as “Ozalism.”

In general, the Ozalism literature highlights Turkey’s pursuit of relations with Turkic and Muslim nations in bid to bolster neo-liberalist economic policies launched by Ozal after a period of failed economic reforms in the 1970s. There is consensus that Ozalism marks an important change of direction in Turkish foreign policy, not only towards pragmatism\(^1\) but also towards a broadened approach to Turkish nationalism. For example, Sedat Laciner argues that while

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\(^1\) This pragmatism was enabled by the military’s modified approach to Kemalism. Previously, Kemalism, the secularist ideological base of modern Turkey, was interpreted by the military in a way that prevented any relations with Muslim countries and only limited trade with European countries. However, the new military constrained the bounds of Kemalism to domestic policies, which enabled them to be more lenient towards Ozal’s eastward orientation.
extending Turkey’s economic reach into new territories, Ozal had a pan-Turkic vision, one that sought to integrate Turkic nations, like Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan within an economic unit. Furthermore, the absence of any literature on the ties between Turkey and Iran in this period is compensated by the literature on the Iran-Iraq war, and Turkey’s opportunism during the war; it is widely understood in the literature that Turkey used the neutrality card to reap the benefits of wartime trade while also contributing to the war effort with ammunitions and lenient border crossings. There is also literature on the military and its involvement with the Cyprus conflict; however, it is irrelevant to the study.

Research on Turkish foreign policy in the 1990s focuses on the Kurdish insurgency and its impact on Turkey’s relations with the Middle East. For example, Robert Olson and Bulent Aras, the leading experts on the regional policy dimension of the Kurdish insurgency, go into extensive detail on Turkey’s severed ties with its neighbors, Syria and Iran, and Iraq to a certain extent, over the PKK issue; both highlight Turkish paranoia about the PKK and how it came to define the country’s policies towards its neighbors.

With regard to domestic developments, academics like Suleyman Elik have highlighted Turkey’s brief moment with Islamism and how this shaped, for a short period of time, the foreign policy agenda. For example, the first concrete steps to building a natural gas line between Iran and Turkey arose in the 1990s. The Islamists’ friendly policies towards Iran at this time increasingly agitated the Turkish military and were extensively written about, but mostly within the perspective of domestic politics. Nevertheless, the views on this topic strike the same chord: the increased interest shown towards Iran by the Islamist Welfare party government (in power for a year between 1996 and 1997) troubled the military, which not only caused a significant
severing of ties between the countries but also served as a basis for the 1997 “post-modern” coup.²

Researchers have extensively explored the topic of Turkey’s foreign policy direction in the 20th century, particularly its engagement with the Middle East. There is even a great degree of multi-vocality on the topic. While many argue that the present Turkish foreign policy is one that reflects “neo-Ottomanism,” meaning active engagement with former Ottoman territories, only some have challenged this commonly accepted notion.

For example, Soner Cagaptay argued in his article “The AKP's Foreign Policy: The Misnomer of Neo-Ottomanism” that viewing the AKP foreign policy through the lens of neo-Ottomanism ignores the facts that Turkey has aligned itself with increasingly radical Islamist causes in the Middle East and pursues a highly economic centric foreign policy. He proposes that AKP’s foreign policy is best described as “econo-Islamist”. Furthermore, Stephen J. Flanagan argues that Turkey’s policies towards Iran have no ideological dimension and simply represent strategic, or security and economic interests. In “The Turkey-Russia-Iran Nexus: Eurasian Power Dynamics,” he understands that the ideological discord between Turkey and Iran is a given and argues that the “zero problems with neighbors” policy of AKP has brought the two countries together in an economic and strategic cooperation.³ Furthermore, Flanagan labels relations between the two as a “wary partnership” and claims that both governments use mutually beneficial economic and energy ties to avoid confrontation.

Stephen Larrabee both confirms and challenges Flanagan’s argument. While Larrabee, in his work titled “Turkish-Iranian Relations in a changing Middle East,” agrees that the countries have fundamentally different political identities and ideologies, and share security and economic

² This coup was different from previous coups in that it simply toppled the present government in place of another—military friendly—civilian government. Previously, the army would also take over political institutions.
interests, he distinctly believes that Iran and Turkey’s regional interests are at odds and that there is currently a struggle for power in the region between the countries. He argues that both countries have sought to “exploit” the new order in the region to achieve their respective interests in the Middle East and that the Syrian Civil War—in which Turkey supports the rebels and Iran the Assad government—is a clear representation of this point. The cacophony of arguments on the subject shows that scholars do not have a definitive understanding as to what has driven Turkey’s friendly policies towards Iran within the past decade. However, there is consensus that Turkey and Iran’s strategic interests are at odds. Nevertheless, there is a prevalent understanding in a majority of the literature that economic relations with Iran are preventing the eruption of an imminent confrontation.

Key Concepts

To clarify the specifics of the project, the dependent and independent variables alongside an explanation of key concepts will be delineated in this section. The central goal of this research is to determine whether there is a clear hierarchy among different interests that shape a country’s foreign policy.

The realist school of international relations argues that security interests are the chief determinant of a state’s actions. Along this line, Michael Desch in his work “Cultures Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies” mentions the widely accepted notion in the realist school that a state’s security interests trump its economic interests, which in turn supersede its ideological commitments when devising foreign policy. While Desch does not elaborate on this point within his article, he examines the advent and different wave of Culturalism in security studies. Culturalists believe that ideational factors as opposed to the

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factors emphasized in the realist school of thought—power and security—better explain how international relations work. Accordingly, “all maintain that cultural variables are more than epiphenomena to material factors and often explain outcomes for which realism cannot account.”\(^6\) Desch explores the different waves of cultural theories to ask the question of “whether these new theories merely supplement realist theories or actually threaten to supplant them.”\(^7\) He argues that, far from supplanting realist theories, cultural theories are only “sometimes useful as a supplement to realist theories.”\(^8\)

A hierarchy means that the utmost interest, which is security in this case, needs to be met in order for policymakers to consider the second category. In other words, when a state has no security concerns vis-à-vis another country, that is, its security is stabilized and guaranteed, then the country is free to consider second order interests such as economic ones. Thus, even if Turkey’s economic policies towards Iran may very likely indicate that Turkey’s primary interests in Iran may be economic, at any given point in time - if this occurs in the context of a stable security understanding between Turkey and Iran, then it is not an instance of economic interests trumping security interests.

The hierarchy is challenged when there is second order interest (interest in economic welfare) or a third order interest (ideological concern) defines the foreign policy in contradiction to security concerns. By contrast, when foreign policy is defined singularly by the interest at the top, the hierarchy is verified. The hierarchy prioritizes security, then economic, then ideological interests. If a higher level of interest is not met, then, according to the hierarchy, the inferior interest should not define foreign policy.

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\(^6\) Ibid., p143.  
\(^7\) Ibid., p141.  
\(^8\) Ibid., p142.
There is one dependent variable and three independent variables. The concept of “Turkish foreign policy towards Iran” is the dependent variable; more specifically, “foreign policy” is the concept that represents the outcome of interest. The three independent variables are security, economic and ideological interests respectively. These concepts will be measured to understand whether there is a hierarchy in interests. Within each of the independent variables (security, economic, and ideological interests) there will also be an examination of the contextual basis of those interests. In brief, Turkey’s interests in Iran, the independent variables, will be assessed through an examination of topics impacting bilateral relations to understand what drives its foreign policy, the dependent variable.

The concept of foreign policy will be defined as: “a strategy or planned course of action developed by the decision makers of a state vis-à-vis other states or international entities to achieve specific goals defined in terms of national interests.” Policy makers may adopt a liberalist or realist approach to foreign policy. In the international relations theory of liberalism, the interdependence of nations in economic, financial, and technological endeavors is emphasized. The proliferation of international organizations and thereby the growth of transnational activities is often cited as a determinant in the interaction amongst countries. For liberal theorists, power is described in complex terms; the role of the military is minimized and security is not viewed in zero-sum terms. In the realist school, the international system is viewed in state-centric and anarchic terms. For realists, interaction among state is based on competition for power and influence, in which military power lies at the center.

There are two different approaches to foreign policy: revisionist and status quo. A revisionist foreign policy refers to “any foreign policy by which a state seeks to alter the existing
international territorial, ideological, or power distribution to its advantage.” Revisionism is expansive and acquisitive in nature, seeking to change the status quo. Lastly, a status quo policy is “any foreign policy aimed at maintaining the existing international territorial, ideological, or power distribution.” It is conservative and defensive in nature. This project aims to figure out which viewpoint and approach Turkey’s foreign policy took at different time periods. The examination of the different periods will likely reveal different trends and trajectories.

Furthermore, the term “national interests” will be defined as “a country's goals and ambitions that can be categorized along the lines of security, economic, or ideological factors.” States act according to these interests when devising policy and deciding on critical issues. Security interests refer to a state’s interest in guaranteeing the means to defend itself against internal and external threats; this may be through alliances and pacts or through the development of military capabilities. Security interests are often based on a state’s perceptions; security threats and a state’s efforts to counter these threats are also based on security interests.

Economic interests encompass maintaining and expanding economic prosperity through trade and investments, as well as providing the best and necessary means of living for citizens. There are also economic imperatives, like the stable supply of energy. A state’s economic needs often impact the sort of trade partnerships and alliances it makes with other states.

Ideological interests are the ideals, principles, or a moral axis a state aims to promote and advance in pursuing policy. This is guided by the vision of the ruling party, which is usually in line with the principles of the party’s electorate. In Turkey the political and ideological fault-lines are primarily nationalistic, Islamist, and Kemalist. So, when a nationalist party comes to power, its ideological interests may be to vehemently oppose any Kurdish advancement. Or

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10 Ibid., 9
11 Ibid., 10
when an Islamist party comes to power, it may be impelled to establish greater interdependence with other Muslim countries. However, the military’s security centric approach to foreign policy is a constant, and has served as the basis for its friction with different political leaders and parties who do not share the same security concerns. Some scholars also refer to humanitarian interests, however I believe that the definition provided for ideological interests encompasses this. In addition, humanitarian interests are often present in wealthy and stable countries.

It will be necessary to identify the “sources” of these interests in order to fully understand what is driving Turkey’s foreign policy towards Iran. The source of an issue is best defined as the force behind a particular occurrence. Throughout this research, the sources of interest will be measured through the identification and analysis of the different individual, domestic, regional-systemic level events and factors. It is unclear which level is the most determinate; often times, each level is important in different cases. However, the various theories of international relations posit different levels to be the most significant. On the one hand, the theories of neorealism and neoliberalism believe that the nature of the international systemic level explains how states act the way they do.\(^\text{12}\) In Turkey, there are several events on the international systemic level that effect the direction of foreign policy. For example, the Cold War, the Iran-Iraq War, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union were international events that had a significant affect on Turkey’s foreign policy. On the other hand, for the constructivist school, the unit level is the most determinate, based on its main premise that relations are historically and socially constructed.\(^\text{13}\)

In Turkey, elected parties could pursue radically different foreign policies (at least for the time allowed by the military). However, the political disposition of ruling parties on the unit

\(^{12}\) For a neorealist, the anarchic nature of the international system makes states seek power self-preservation. For neoleiberalists, the interdependent nature of the world renders the systemic level the most significant.

\(^{13}\) Constructivism emphasizes the importance of the identities and interests of actors.
level was also significantly impacted by the nature of the international system. So it is impossible to adjudicate which level best explains the foreign policy direction of Turkey vis-à-vis Iran in this period.

Clarifying the concept of the military in the Turkish case, which will be referred to throughout this study, is essential. Even in periods where the military did not officially rule, the system afforded it a position of significant power, making it an essential component at all levels of politics. This sentence perfectly sums the role of the military in Turkish society and politics:

“The military, as the most important component of the state in Turkey, enjoys double autonomy. First, by virtue of a strong state tradition in Turkey, the military maintains broad autonomy vis-à-vis society in all of its segments. Secondly, it has an autonomous status within the state against civilian politicians and against other bureaucratic agencies.”

Theoretical framework

I hypothesize that the hierarchy of interests, as presented by Desch, will hold in the different stages of Turkey’s foreign policy towards Iran. Security interests will predominate as long as Turkey feels that it is incapable of handling the security threats and risks presented by Iran. Nevertheless, the fact that security interests are often based on perception may distort realities, and a state may act against its actual, real interests. The military in Turkey often ensures that security interests are taken seriously; nevertheless, I predict that the hierarchy may be challenged when the military’s hold over politics is weakened or diminished. Security interests may not predominate foreign policy interests during civilian rule because politicians are often concerned with short-term interests.

The roots of labeling security as the most significant determinant of a state’s action are based in the realist and neo-realist school of thoughts. The realist school assumes that power is the key factor prevalent in all relationships; in a system of anarchy, states continually seek power. Accordingly, power is most tangible in military and security capabilities. Without guaranteed security, states logically cannot pursue economic and ideological interests.

In the case of Iran and Turkey, both countries maintain a relatively equal military standing. Furthermore, Turkey’s NATO membership establishes a clear military advantage over Iran, possibly countering Turkey’s concerns over Iran’s nuclear development. However, the existence of the Kurdish insurgency movement PKK, and Iran’s clandestine support of it made security issues salient in Turkey’s foreign policy agenda throughout the mid 1980s and the 1990s. These potentially show how security interests can supersede all other interests.

Lastly, while there is not much literature on the topic of which factor(s) takes precedent within the national interest, Nye and Keohane’s theory of “complex interdependence” offers the only alternative explanation to Desch’s hierarchy proposition. They argue that the agenda of interstate relationships consists of multiple issues that are not arranged in a clear or consistent hierarchy. They claim that the age of globalization and subsequent economic interdependence has decreased a state’s propensity to seek military superiority and has brought economic interests to the fore of a state’s calculations, I hypothesize that this is not the case with Turkey. The fact that a state is not obsessed with building military technology does not mean that economic interests take precedent to security interests. So long as certain security measures, pacts, or capabilities guarantee a state’s security, then economic development may be first on the state’s

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15 Ibid., p23
17 This theory does not hold, especially considering the current U.S.-China relationship.
agenda. However, should a security threat emerge, economic linkage to other countries will not prevent a country from prioritizing its security.

**Evidence**

This section will include a discussion of the reasoning behind choosing Iran as a case and how evidence will be collected. This research project is a “small N” analysis; it seeks to understand Turkey’s foreign policy mechanism with regards to one country, Iran. I chose to examine Turkish foreign policy vis-à-vis Iran because all of the dimensions of the hierarchy—interests of security, economy, and ideology—exist in Turkey’s relations with Iran. Examining Turkey’s relations with Iran may seem to limit a comprehensive understanding of Turkey’s general foreign policy trends; however, Iran has historically occupied a crucial node in Turkish foreign policy, and continues to do so.

The evidence will differ according to the periods being examined. For the first period, between 1980 and 1989, there is a dearth of primary sources. Most of the newspaper articles and testimonies have to do with Turkey’s military coup and its subsequent fallout with the European Community. While there could be more, there are secondary sources, books and journal articles on Turkey’s attitude and initiatives with regards to Iran in this period. The evidence consists of correspondence, diplomatic or political crises, economic and/or political initiatives, and the records on trade with Iran.

In the examination of the following decade, there are plenty of sources regarding Turkey’s interaction with Iran in the framework of the Kurdish question and the PKK threat because the 1990s are the height of Turkey’s Kurdish insurgency. In addition, outstanding circumstances, both domestic and international, not directly having to with Iran, but indirectly
affecting Turkey’s foreign policy will also be used as evidence. For example, the emergence of domestic trends, like the rise of political Islam will be an important factor to examine.

Trade agreements and figures will constitute a considerable portion of evidence. While I will not be charting trade statistics, I will be noting the significant shifts, such as a major upsurges and decreases. Because the Turkish market was deemed to be a critical emerging market, there is an abundance of research on the foreign policy aspect of Turkey’s economy. In addition, agreements regarding economic initiatives are relatively easy to find and are also efficient reflectors of Turkey’s interests. For example, as a major energy importing country, the state of Turkey’s energy insecurity/security is crucial to understanding its foreign policy.

For the final period of examination, while there are plenty of secondary sources, there are also significant primary sources. Foreign policy columns on major newspapers in Turkey, especially those written by Erdogan’s key advisors, and think tank reports will be crucial. The former academic and Foreign Minister Davutoglu’s (now Prime Minister) ideas shaped this period greatly; therefore, his book titled “Strategic Depth,” which outlines a vision of world politics and foreign policy that has shaped his party’s foreign policy, will be a critical primary source.

I hope that this research contributes to the expanding literature on Turkish foreign policy and more specifically to the often-avoided area of Turkish-Iranian relations. With its contextual and thematic approach, I believe this research will distinguish itself from among others. At present, there is a surge of material on Turkey’s current foreign policy direction. However, understanding when and if the ‘hierarchy of interests’ proposition held with regard to Turkey’s policies towards Iran will help clarify the drivers of Turkish foreign policy more clearly. Analyzing how and when which interests define a state’s actions will not only contribute to
making sense of Turkey’s current foreign policy trajectory, but also clarify state behavior in a changing global order.

Chapter One: All Roads Lead to the Kurdish Question: the limits of Turkish opportunism

The examination of the ideological, economic, and security ties between Turkey and Iran in the period between 1980 and 1989 largely confirms Michael Desch’s hierarchy of interests proposition: that a state’s security interests trump its economic considerations, which in turn supersede ideological commitments in a state’s determination of foreign policy. Prior to the Iranian revolution, Turkey’s ideological disposition, namely its interest in promoting secularism in a majority Muslim society, was greatly compatible with the policies of the Shah who also forcefully imposed western and secular ideas on his society. However, from 1979 on, the radical Islamist trajectory of Khomeini’s Islamic Republic of Iran placed the ideological commitments of the Turkish republic and Iran at extreme odds.

Nonetheless, the two countries ignored their ideological differences and pursued strong economic relations when their economic interests so dictated. Later in the decade, however, Iran’s backing of the Kurdish insurgency led to a significant divergence in security interests between Turkey and Iran. This divergence brought to the fore the ideological differences between the two countries that heretofore had been suppressed. This clash not only led to the beginning of a war of ideologically driven rhetoric, but also contributed to Turkey’s unwillingness to continue bilateral economic initiatives after the global fall of oil prices. Turkey’s security interests in this period led to critical fallout between the two countries. In this way, this decade of Turkish foreign policy affirms Desch’s hierarchy.

Ideological Interests
By the beginning of the 1980s, Turkey and Iran occupied positions on the opposite and extreme ends of the ideological spectrum- the former with its unwavering hold of secularism and the latter with its staunch advocacy radical Islamism. In order to understand the degree of ideological divide between Turkey and Iran after 1979, a brief investigation of Kemalism and the Iranian revolution is useful.

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk founded the modern Turkish state with the principles of Kemalism at its foundational core. The six governing principles of Kemalism were republicanism, populism, nationalism, secularism, statism, and reformism. The principle of secularism was modeled on the French concept of Laïcité and it called for eradicating religion and religiously motivated ideology from public life. Upholding secularism was considered to be a critical national interest that the military was vested to protect. In defense of this principle, the Turkish military conducted three coups and one “post-modern coup” since 1960. Kemalism retains its staunch secularism and nationalism until the present day.

In contrast to Turkey, Iran after 1979 was seized with Islamic fervor. This was true on the home front where the new regime imposed Islamic orthodoxy on state and society. This Islamic fervor also presented itself in the country’s external relations. After the revolution, Iran’s foreign policy revolved around Khomeini’s aim to systematize the revolution and export policies to other Islamic countries; this policy was consolidated through the Iranian embassies abroad and the Ministry of the Ershad-I Islam, or the Ministry of Culture, responsible for “preparing the ground for spread of the culture of Islamic Revolution and Persian language in other countries.”\(^{18}\) The 1980s constituted the height of Khomeini’s commitment to the export of Islam. In fact, Iran’s efforts to transport Iranian branded Islamic fundamentalism to Iraq is one of the reasons Iran had a fallout with the Baathi regime, which eventually led to the breakout of war between the two

neighbors. Moreover, Khomeini repeatedly expressed his repugnance of the secularist modernization policies of Ataturk, even going as far as to saying Iran would work towards the Islamization of Turkey. Although Iran did not apply any systemic revolutionary politics towards Turkey, it supported small Islamic groups within Turkish society. On the ideological front, the two countries were at complete odds.

In the first part of the decade, there were no diplomatic crises driven by this ideological divide. However, as security issues began to mount and economic relations began to wane in the latter half of the decade, Turkey and Iran began to clash more openly based on ideological issues. It was in the context of the heated conflict over Iranian indirect support of the PKK debates and Turkey’s incursions into northern Iraq that Khomeini gave a speech on August 24, 1986 strongly criticizing the secular underpinnings of Turkey, Ataturk in particular.

Turkey responded diplomatically to what was labeled as “internal interference in its secular politics.” Turkish foreign minister Vahit Halefoglu embarked on a four-day visit to Tehran on August 26, 1986, during which he warned his counterpart about using diplomatic language and not interfering in Turkey’s internal affairs. However, undiplomatic actions as a result of the ideological divide continued and even became a general attitude of diplomatic envoys from Iran. For example, Prime Minister Mousavi publicly criticized the reforms of Ataturk and refused to pay homage at his mausoleum (a protocol required by all visiting officials) during a visit in 1987. While Prime Minister Ozal did not respond to his undiplomatic behavior, Chief of

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19 Elik, Suleyman. Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011: Conceptualising the Dynamics of Politics, Religion, and Security in Middle-power States., p38
20 Ibid., 41
21 Ibid., 41
22 Ibid., 41
23 Ibid., 41
General Staff and other military colleagues expressed their distaste for such actions and words, even adding that this attitude was “nothing short of personal insult.”

These tensions were further highlighted when in January 1987, President Kenan Evren announced that Islamic fundamentalism was resurrected in Turkey and that officials need to take measures against it. All the while, state officials criticized Iran for intervening in Turkey’s internal affairs. These events contributed to the Turkish military’s decision to brand Islamic fundamentalism as a core threat, thereby transforming this ideologically driven interest into a security interest, which will be elaborated in greater depth in the section on security.

Furthermore, a series of ideologically based diplomatic crises occurred between the countries following the end of the Iran-Iraq war, by which time Turkey’s economic ties and security understanding had largely collapsed. In November 1988, the Iranian embassy in Ankara did not obey protocol to lower its flag to half-mast in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Ataturk’s death. The Turkish press regarded this as an “unforgivable insolence.”

In addition, the Salmon Rushdie affair extended its influence to Turkish-Iranian relations. In a speech in Konya on April 10, 1988, the Iranian ambassador in Ankara, Mottaki, conveyed that Iran was dissatisfied with Turkey’s indifference to the Satanic verses. Iranians exerted pressure to have the book banned, while the Iranian council in the city of Erzurum in Turkey distributed copies of Khomeini’s fatwa to the muftis throughout eastern Turkey. When it was revealed that Iran sent religious propaganda leaflets as a diplomatic paper to the Iranian consulate in 1989, the Turkish foreign ministry declared that the diplomatic mission could no

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24 Ibid., 41
25 Heper, Metin, Historical Dictionary of Turkey. pxii.
27 Ibid., p42.
28 While Turkey signed on to the OIC communiqué calling for a ban on Satanic Verses, Turkey did not follow up with the legal process to ban the book.
longer bring in 50kg of baggage without examination. Furthermore, Iran actively protested Turkey’s constitutional edict banning Islamic attire at schools. In fact, Iran’s ambassador to Turkey, Mottaki announced that ‘Iran is considering to implement economic sanction against Turkey’ as a result of the new law. Sanctions were never implemented, however, Mottaki was subsequently declared a persona non grata and Iran had to call him back from Turkey.

Lastly, waves of criticism were largely prevalent in Turkish newspapers. For example, Ali Sirmen, the Middle East editor of the Cumhuriyet newspaper, labeled Khomeini “a nearly 9-year old man who still thirsts for blood as a terrorist activist and waxes nostalgia for the Shah.” Turkish journalist Altan Oyemen called his regime “a terrorist administration.” By the end of this period, ideological tensions culminated in the form of a palpable diplomatic crisis and leftist reaction to Iran, with nothing like a security arrangement or economic interests to hold it back. Between 1988 and 1989, diplomatic relations were severely restrained and both countries had recalled their ambassadors.

Economic Interests

The surge in trade and economic initiatives between Iran and Turkey after the Iranian Revolution, despite the deeply rooted ideological divide, shows that economic interests trumped ideological considerations in this time frame. Moreover, the fallout in economic relations after 1985, when the security interests of the two countries began to seriously diverge suggests that economic interests cannot override security interests. These two developments verify Desch’s hierarchy.

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29 Ibid., p42
30 Ibid., 45
31 Ibid., 45
32 Ibid., 45
33 Ibid., 43
Several factors drove a convergence of economic interests between Turkey and Iran in the first half of the 1980s. On the Turkish side, isolation from the European Community, the need for new export outlets, and energy insecurity necessitated pragmatism in its dealings with Iran.\textsuperscript{34} On the Iranian side, sanctions and isolation from conventional allies in the wake of the Iranian revolution as well as war with Iraq and the needs of a wartime economy made Iran desperate for new economic partnerships as well as manufactured goods and iron, and also a transit route for the transportation of key weapons and goods, particularly from Syria.\textsuperscript{35} The contextual situation of both countries resulted in a convergence of interests; Iran and Turkey could provide the other with its needs. If ideological interests were of greater importance for a state, then neither country would pursue economic relations with the other during this period. However, both trade and economic cooperation between the two countries flourished in the first half of this period.

Turkey’s policy towards the Iran-Iraq war in the first half of the decade was driven by economic calculations and serves to further verify the supremacy of economic interests over ideological deliberations. In the context of several unsuccessful attempts of economic reform in 1978-79, two failed IMF programs, and rapidly increasing inflation, the new military government in Turkey could not ignore the necessities of the economic stabilization package of 1980.\textsuperscript{36} The Turkish military government understood that economic crises only fueled political instability but the embrace of a liberalized export-led growth strategy demanded the accumulation of capital and a search for new markets. In addition, Turkey’s energy insecurity required attention; not only did the growth of industry demand stable sources of energy but also,

\textsuperscript{34} Aricanli, Tosun, and Dani Rodrik. "An Overview of Turkey's Experience with Economic Liberalization and Structural Adjustment." p1344.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p1347
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p1343
two thirds of Turkey’s foreign earnings were consumed by its energy bill, making it necessary for Turkey to seek efficient and continuous sources of energy.3738

The Iran-Iraq war provided the ultimate occasion to pursue these goals. Turkey quickly realized the opportunity presented by neutrality and increased trade with both of the belligerents.39 To safeguard its interests, active engagement with both parties in all spheres, a policy known as “active neutrality,” was announced on October 2, 1980.40 The war was therefore the official instigator of a “trade obsessed foreign policy,” in which Iran occupied a central role.41 Although Turkey did shuttle diplomacy during the first years of the war as a key member of the OIC, Ankara understood that the shift of balance in the region was in its favor and chose to exploit it economically.

Likewise, Iran’s decision to foster trade and economic arrangements with Turkey further proves that economic interests overrule ideological deliberations. Iran’s imperative to alleviate its international isolation ensured that Turkey’s efforts at greater economic interdependence were not one-sided. The Iran-Iraq war occurred a year after the Iranian Revolution, which had led Iran to sever ties with its important western allies, particularly the US. Furthermore, Iran’s greatest ally and supply source, Syria, was made inaccessible by the war with Iraq. Using Turkey as a transit route was the best alternative to receive supplies from Syria. Alliance with Turkey looked advantageous.

The supremacy of economic interests over ideological interests is further demonstrated by Turkey’s inability to abandon Iran as a substantial energy provider, a tie that was first established

37 Turkey still imports a majority of its natural gas and oil.
40 Ibid., p24
when Turkey had highly amicable relations with the Shah’s Iran decades earlier. It is necessary to understand that Turkey stood at a critical juncture at the beginning of the 1980s; the Iranian revolution, the Turkish military coup, and the Iran-Iraq war all occurred within the span of a year and presented Turkey with opportunities to sever ties with Iran. Had ideological interests been of greater importance than economic interests, economic relations should have declined at this time. The Iranian revolution and the subsequent ideological tension provided the perfect occasion for Turkey to sever economic ties with Iran. Similarly, the Iran-Iraq War again presented Turkey with an occasion to completely sever ties with Iran and align itself with the ideologically compatible Baathi regime in Iraq. Instead, Turkey translated the wartime despair of both Iran and Iraq into an economic opportunity period. It provided clandestine support of wartime effort all the while playing the role of a neutral mediator and actively seeking economic agreements. In this way, Turkey reaped the economic benefits of war.

During the initial years of the war, Turkey set aside its ideological preferences and interests and followed active neutral policies, allowing both Tehran and Baghdad to consider Ankara as a reliable transit route for goods.42 As a result, Turkey tacitly supported warfare by giving permission to both countries to use its land as a transit route for arms. This was made evident on two occasions in particular. In November 1980, the American embassy in Turkey reported “substantial quantities of Israeli goods transit Turkey to Islamic belligerents” in Iran.43 The cable noted that 17,000 tons of Israeli chemical products awaited shipment to Iran.44 Moreover, Turkey’s duplicity became public when a cargo plane carrying Israeli arms for Iran crashed on

42 Elik, Suleyman. Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011: Conceptualising the Dynamics of Politics, Religion, and Security in Middle-power States., p163
43 Hentov, Elliot. ”The Ostensible 'Silent Victor'? The Long-term Impact of the Iran-Iraq War on Turkey,” p128.
44 Ibid., p128
the Turkish-Soviet border on July 18, 1981. While top officials repeatedly denied allegations, this pattern of Turkish behavior, actively engaging in garnering economic benefits while ensuring war supplies reached both Iran and Iraq can be labeled as Turkish opportunism.

Nonetheless, the war had great potential to affect Turkey’s energy supplies, so while Turkey called for an immediate ceasefire and return to status quo ante, it was diplomatically focused on securing its oil supplies from both Iran and Iraq. Using its deal with Saudi Arabia, which ensured oil supplies in case of shortage, Turkey was able to make agreements with both Iraq and Iran for oil delivery on more preferable terms than before, largely solving the problem of its huge energy bill. Accordingly, “these terms were increasingly based on barter or credit and both warring parties demanded a wider list of Turkish products in return which enabled Turkey to shrink its trade deficit and improve its economic prospects.” Economic benefits during the war were reaped not only through the generation of income as a transit route, but also through a promotion of Turkish goods.

Through a series of reciprocal visits, agreements and deals, Turkey established a stable basis for trade with Iran. Noteworthy interaction includes Turkish trade minister Canturk’s visit to Tehran on April 22, 1981; the deal secured a credit line of $500 million, the maintaining of a 24-hour border crossing, and the development of better transportation links. Ozal, the figurehead of economic reform and the newly elected Prime Minister in 1982, took economic cooperation to a whole new level through intense diplomatic and economic exchanges. Ozal made a historic 5-day visit to Tehran on March 5, 1982 alongside a 188-member delegation,

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45 Ibid., p128
46 Ibid., p127
47 $300 million would cover oil purchases.
48 Ibid., p128
almost aimed exclusively at securing economic deals.\footnote{Ibid., p130} There he outlined a vision for the construction of an Ahvaz-Iskenderun oil pipeline as well as a gas pipeline to transport Iranian gas to Europe.\footnote{Ibid., p130} Furthermore, on June 7, 1980 the 12 May International Road transport agreement was signed, from which the decision to establish a new protocol on banking, economics and trade emerged.\footnote{Elik, Suleyman. Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011: Conceptualising the Dynamics of Politics, Religion, and Security in Middle-power States., p163} The additional barter and trade protocol agreements of 1981 had already dramatically increased trading volume.

1982 in particular was a very fruitful year of diplomatic back and forth, all of which resulted in dynamic new ideas for increased economic cooperation and eventually new economic protocols. For example, on January 2, 1982 Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati visited Ankara where Ozal brought up the idea of barter trade based on Turkish food exports for Iranian oil.\footnote{Hentov, Elliot. "The Ostensible 'Silent Victor'? The Long-term Impact of the Iran-Iraq War on Turkey., p130} Iranian minister of industries, Mostafa Hashimi and his Turkish counterpart, Mehmet Turgut signed an economic protocol in Ankara.\footnote{Ibid., p130} The barter agreement and trade accord of January 14 and March 10, 1982 laid the foundation for the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meetings.\footnote{Elik, Suleyman. Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011: Conceptualising the Dynamics of Politics, Religion, and Security in Middle-power States., p164}

Moreover, Foreign Minister Turkmen finalized a transportation agreement and studies for oil and gas pipelines during a visit in October.\footnote{Hentov, Elliot. "The Ostensible 'Silent Victor'? The Long-term Impact of the Iran-Iraq War on Turkey., p129} The JEC held four meetings until 1985. During its second meeting in 1984, the accord on industrial and technological cooperation was signed. In the third meeting, a new road map for the building of natural gas and crude oil pipelines between the countries was introduced. The additional protocol to this contract diversified non-oil products
allocated for export with a planned $3 billion trade volume.\textsuperscript{56} The fourth JEC meeting concluded with another accord in Tehran on 30 December 1985. By way of these agreements, new regulations on border trade were also introduced. During this span, Turkish exports to Iran increased from $45 million in 1978 to $1.088 billion in 1983, constituting 19 percent of Turkey’s total exports.\textsuperscript{57} In addition, Turkey’s imports from Iran increased from $189 million in 1978 to $1.548 billion in 1984. The volume of exports eventually reached a peak of $2.5 billion by 1985.\textsuperscript{58} By 1985, Turkish exports to Iran were 25 times the amount in the late 1970s and Iran was Turkey’s largest trading partner.

However, as Iran slowly began to cutback its oil production in 1984 and oil prices began to decline worldwide, trade began to steeply decline. The diversion of resources to the war only contributed to this trend. Eventually, Iran’s economy suffered from foreign exchange shortages, which resulted in the curtailment of its purchases from Turkey. The drop in oil prices in 1986 (from $26 to $10) led to the cancellation of the 1981 and 1982 barter agreements, which severely affected the trajectory of trade between Turkey and Iran.\textsuperscript{59}

Economic relations were maintained through the diligent effort of the pragmatists on both sides, despite the inception of security tensions in 1983 when Iran began to forge alliances with Kurdish groups in Iran. Iranian leaders paid specific attention not to antagonize the Turks and therefore maintained regular high-level engagement with Turkish counterparts throughout the mid-1980s.\textsuperscript{60} For example, in February, shortly after the finalization of trade agreements in 1982, Velayati and President Khameini gave interviews to Cumhuriyet, the staunchly Kemlist

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p130
\item \textsuperscript{57} Elik, Suleyman. Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011: Conceptualising the Dynamics of Politics, Religion, and Security in Middle-power States., p164
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p163
\item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p165
\item \textsuperscript{60} Hentov, Elliot. "The Ostensible 'Silent Victor'? The Long-term Impact of the Iran-Iraq War on Turkey," p138
\end{itemize}
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newspaper. In addition, Rafsanjani stated in 1983, right as Turkey’s concerns with regards to Iran’s role in the Kurdish insurgency began to form, that “Iran had extensive relations with Turkey and posed no threat to Turkish interests in the region.” On the Turkish side, Ozal believed that strong economic ties would eventually resolve political issues and therefore acted in great haste to improve economic interdependence.

The tensions on the security front, nevertheless, alarmed Iran because of its potential to cause a fallout in economic relations, such that on 16 January 1985, PM Mousavi visited Ankara to test the tides and find opportunities to deepen bilateral ties. During this visit, Turkey and Iran signed a preliminary agreement to construct an oil and gas pipeline through Turkey to the Mediterranean. Furthermore, upon Iranian initiative, on January 29, 1985, the RCD (regional cooperation for development) was revived under the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). The organization was designed to promote economic, technical, and cultural cooperation between Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan as a means to expand economic relations beyond oil sales. Turkey’s economic relations with Iran were relatively smooth throughout 1985 because Iran actively sought to assure Ankara that its alliance with Kurdish groups in Northern Iraq would “do no harm” to Turkey. Despite Iran’s symbolic diplomatic initiatives to reassure Turkey in this way, by 1984 and 1985, the economic dimension of Turkey’s foreign policy increasingly came into conflict with security considerations.

With the emergence of the Kurdish insurgency as a critical concern for both Turkey and Iran, bureaucrats were unable to revive trade between the two countries. Exports of Turkish goods to Iran fell considerably and Turkey mostly stopped importing oil from Iran in the first 6 months of

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61 Ibid., p130
63 Hentov, Elliot. "The Ostensible 'Silent Victor'? The Long-term Impact of the Iran-Iraq War on Turkey,” p135
1986. The volume of transactions between the countries remained lower than $1 billion in 1986.\textsuperscript{64} Furthermore, the plans previously laid out to develop gas pipelines between Iran to Turkey were dropped. Ultimately, the emergence of security issues explains the reluctance to engage in economic initiatives. With tensions brewing with regards to the Kurdish insurgency in northern Iraq, and the added drop in oil prices, Turkey was discouraged from continuing its economic initiatives with Iran. With the decline that began in 1986, Turkish exports to Iran reached pre-war figures only at the end of the war. This decline of economic relations in the face of security tensions suggests the priority of security interests over economic ones, as suggested by Desch.

Security Interests

A direct causal link between the decreased momentum in economic interactions and the emergence of security issues between Iran and Turkey cannot be irrefutably proven due to the confounding factor of oil prices (declining world oil prices at this time decreased Iran’s capacity to sustain high trade imports). However, the fact that security conflict coincided with Turkey’s severing economic relations with Iran is at least suggestive of the claim that security interests take precedence in a state’s overall interests. Turkey’s security concerns focused on two issues: (1) Iran’s alliance with the KDP (a Kurdish insurgency movement in Iraq), an ally of PKK (the Kurdish insurgency movement in Turkey); (2) the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The divergence in security interests solidified mid-way through the decade and coincided with the decline in economic relations.

By the mid 1980s, The Turkish regime believed Kurdish nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism were susceptible to be reignited by outside interference and geostrategic and political changes. Anti-secularism had been on the rise among conservative Muslim portions of

\textsuperscript{64} Elik, Suleyman. Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011: Conceptualising the Dynamics of Politics, Religion, and Security in Middle-power States, p164
society. For example, in what is often labeled as the last straw that triggered the military coup of 1980, protestors gathered in Konya for a “Jerusalem” political meeting in reaction to Israel’s declaration that Jerusalem would be the permanent capital of Israel. During the meeting, the 100,000+ protestors booed the national anthem and professed slogans against secularism. These sort of protests had increased in the 1970s. The Iranian revolution, and the flurry of fanaticism it drove across the region, heightened the military’s fear that Islamic fundamentalism would spread. Khomeini’s speech in 1986 calling for the export of Islamic revolution served to turn the prospect of seeping Islamism from Iran into a grave security concern for Turkey. Consequently, friction over secularism and Islamism began to dominate the interactions between the states.

Moreover, the Kurdish issue emerged as a distinct threat in the 1980s when PKK, founded by Abdullah Ocalan in 1978 began to gain popularity. The PKK had emerged in the 1970s as a distinct Marxist movement, a byproduct of the left-right war of the late 1970s that the military coup aimed to crush. It gained approval among Turkey’s Kurds despite the army’s effort to quell this through harassment of Kurdish civilians. In fact many analysts argue that the military’s overreaction to the PKK allowed it to gain a popular base and fostered its ability to pose a formidable threat to the Turkish state. By utilizing guerilla and insurgency tactics, the PKK aimed to create a separate land for the Kurds. Turkey wanted to maintain its territorial integrity and therefore blocked any movement that might have contributed to separationist currents. Turkey’s fear of the establishment of a Kurdish state both in Turkey and in the region was overwhelming. Such that, Turkey’s major concern over the Iranian Revolution was its potential for failure and the threat that the subsequent fragmentation of Iran would lead to the establishment of a Kurdish state. The PKK used territories in Syria, Iraq, and Iran, to launch

65 Ibid., p47
67 Ibid., p134
attacks on Turkey. Consequently, the PKK occupied a pivotal spot in Turkey’s dialogue with its neighbors.

Much of Turkey’s foreign policy calculations in this decade were shaped by concern about these two factors and the extent of control the military felt it had over these factors. Turkey’s interest in keeping down Islamism and Kurdish nationalism was a vital security interest because the very existence and livelihood of these forces threatened the foundations of the state. Furthermore, the fear of external subversion in these two areas relates to Turkey’s security concerns vis a vis Iran and therefore should be treated as a security interest.

Changes in the battlefield in Iraq from mid-1983 onwards had the potential to empower Kurdish insurgency and challenge Turkey’s geostrategic positioning. As such, this marks the inception of security concerns as the overwhelming influence on the bilateral ties between Iran and Turkey. At the start of the Iran-Iraq war, Turkey did not perceive Iran to be a military or strategic threat because much of the war in the early years took place far from Turkey on the southern front near Basra. However, in 1983 Iraq’s northern Kurdish region became an active war theater and Turkey began to be disturbed by the pressure mounting on its southern edge. This manifested in two strategic threats: the first concerned the prospect of Iran’s bombardment of the Kirkuk-Iskenderun pipeline, which had been Turkey’s energy lifeline (revenue from transit fee was nearly 40% of oil volume). The second concerned the spill over effects of the war which sparked new dynamics among Kurdish factors in northern Iraq.

As the PKK was draw into the Iran-Iraq war, Turkey’s relations with both Iran and Iraq became secondary to calculations about the relative standing of the PKK. In 1983 and 1984,

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68 Olson, Robert W. The Kurdish Question and Turkish-Iranian Relations: From World War I to 1998, p29.
70 Ibid., p136
71 Ibid., p132
72 Ibid., p133
when the war expanded into northern Iraq, the PKK established a relationship with the Kurdistan Democratic party (KDP), which controlled most of the territory; it was through the Iraqi border areas and hinterland that PKK launched attacks on Turkey.\(^73\) This resulted in the Turkish military’s retaliation against Kurdish guerillas and civilians both inside Turkey and also those in northern Iraq throughout the 1980s and 1990s. These developments made Turkey reliant on the cooperation of Iraq.

The Turks’ Kurdish paranoia began to reflect on its relationship with Iran in July 1983 when Iran launched offensive into northern Iraq near the Kurdish stronghold at Haji Omran and established an alliance with the PKK ally, KDP.\(^74\) Iran’s offensive and subsequent partnership had immense influence on Turkey’s strategic calculation. Saddam’s response to this partnership, seeking an agreement with the KDP’s rival faction, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which had split from KDP in 1975, only made matter worse.\(^75\) These alliances worried Ankara; in Ankara’s view, it set precedent in favor of granting the Kurds autonomy and weakened Turkey’s denial of any form of autonomy for its own Kurdish population. Both Tehran and Baghdad were de-facto arming their Kurdish allies; Baghdad in particular was releasing PUK fighters or re-enlisting them in Kurdish units of the Iraqi army in the north, Turkey anticipated that these groups would eventually use their capabilities against it.\(^76\) Even if Baghdad succeeded in pushing back the Iran-KDP alliance by backing PUK, the outcome in either case would be instability and lack of authority in northern Iraq, which would potentially serve PKK’s guerilla

\(^73\) Ibid., p135  
\(^74\) Ibid., 134  
attacks.\textsuperscript{77} To offset these developments, Turkey sought closer cooperation with both Iraq and Iran in constraining the freedom of action of the PKK, although Iraq had a more central role.

However, Turkey sustained its unilateral military actions in the region. On May 26, 1983 it launched a 25-mile deep ground incursion into northern Iraq with 8,000-10,000 troops and captured several hundred PKK members. Turkey’s effort to keep cooperation with Iran to a minimum and continued unilateralism was aimed towards maintaining greater control over its own security interests. This however deepened Iran’s suspicions about Turkey’s intentions in northern Iraq. Iran’s belief that Turkey had ulterior motives in establishing an economic and political hold over northern Iraq contributed to mutual distrust and led to significant friction.

Throughout 1984 and 1985, Iran sensed Turkey’s agitation by its growing involvement with the Kurdish population in northern Iraq and sought to placate officials through symbolic economic initiatives, albeit, to no avail. For example, the Iranian Foreign Minister reiterated Tehran’s satisfaction with Turkish neutrality and prospect of increased oil deliveries during a visit in August 1984.\textsuperscript{78} However, by late 1984, it became clear that security was an overriding concern of the Turkish government. On October 15, 1984, Turkey signed a security protocol with Iraq that allowed for each party to enter 5km into the other’s territory without prior consent to combat the PKK.\textsuperscript{79} It seemed natural for Ankara to seek a similar arrangement from Tehran to protect its position as neutral player in the war and because PKK members had also fled into Iranian territory. Although Prime Minister Mousavi dismissed the request on basis on sovereignty, just a month after the Turkish incursion into Iraq, Iran and Turkey signed an agreement that committed both countries to “prohibit any activity on its territory aimed against the other’s security” and prevent their territory from being used for attacks on the other or to

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 135
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 138
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p135
provide sanctuary to hostile groups. Furthermore, the deal also presented an opportunity to stress bilateral friendship and to announce a reciprocal visit in 1985. Nevertheless, when the deal was struck, for Turkey the threat was the PKK and for Iran the threat was the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), a Marxist Leninist organization with presence in Turkey that had previously worked against the Shah and was subsequently suppressed by Khomeini. While this development may signal a convergence of interests, the Iran-Iraq war compelled Iran to cooperate with Kurdish insurgencies, against the interests of Turkey. Therefore, measures such as this security arrangement, delayed but could not impede the divergence of strategic interests that grew with Iran’s gains in the Iran-Iraq war.

When the PKK issue came to dominate the security and economic interests of both Turkey and Iran, vis-a-vis each other, Turkish neutrality in the war was put into question. On August 13, 1986 the PKK carried out a high profile attack on a military outpost in southeast Turkey, in which twelve soldiers died. In turn, Turkey launched a massive air raid against PKK targets across the border. While over 165 PKK militants were killed, this move attracted criticism from Iran due to concerns for its Kurdish allies in northern Iraq. On August 23, 1986, Turkey followed up with a ground incursion with over 1000 troops deep into Iraqi territory, which resulted in the capture of 35 PKK militants. Because the Kurdish insurgency was a critical asset for Iran during the war, Turkey’s incursions severely weakened Iran’s war effort against Iraq.

Turkey was well aware of Iran’s alarm, yet Ankara’s security concerns with regards to the PKK superseded diplomatic interests and economic ties were certainly unable to restrain its commitment to this issue. Repeated military incursions and increased Iraqi oil exports through

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80 Ibid., p136
81 By 1989 there were between 1-1.5 million Iranians in Turkey whose political activities worried Iran.
82 Olson, Robert W. The Kurdish Question and Turkish-Iranian Relations: From World War I to 1998, p31.
Turkey began to portray Ankara as a party to the conflict. Tensions mounted in September when Iran-allied KDP announced that it was joining forces with the PKK and that together they would strike at Kirkuk. In Tehran Turkish entry into war was considered a looming prospect. On the one hand, Tehran sharpened its rhetoric and expressed suspicions of Turkey’s ulterior motives; Rafsanjani went as far as to state that Kirkuk’s oil wealth belongs to the Kurdish people in contrast with Turkish claims that Kirkuk was majority Turkmen.⁸⁴ On the other hand, Turkey continued its raids and remained passive to such suggestions. Both sides were clearly aware of each other concerns. So, when Iran’s ambassador to Turkey Manuchehr Mottaki identified the Kirkuk-Ceyhun pipeline as a legitimate economic target because it supported the Iraqi war effort, Ozal was compelled to stress Turkey’s determination to protect the pipeline.⁸⁵

The Turkish military’s agitation with Iran’s behavior furthered the ideological gap and even served to transform ideological differences into a national security issue. Hentov argues that the “the larger impact [of this episode] went well beyond the strategic importance of the Kirkuk pipeline. The mutual suspicion drew attention to the ideological gap between Tehran and Ankara.”⁸⁶ Indeed, on January 8, 1987, president Evren gave a major speech at Cukurova University identifying Islamic fundamentalism as a threat equivalent to communism.⁸⁷⁸⁸ A week later, Mousavi told a Turkish emissary that Turkey had to respect Islamic values to be able to play a role in the region, to which Evren responded by telling Ozal that this was a “game [they were] not to join.”⁸⁹ Considering that this took place during the Cold War, when communism

⁸⁴ Ibid., 139  
⁸⁵ Ibid., 139  
⁸⁶ Ibid., 139  
⁸⁷ Ibid., 139  
⁸⁸ Later in his memoirs, Evren wrote that Iran seemed to be amplifying the domestic headscarf debate.  
⁸⁹ Ibid., 139
was the biggest security threat to many, likening Islamic Fundamentalism to be an equivalent threat shows the extent to which the military felt with regards to its ideological interests.

The fact that Turkey continued to ignore Iran when making decisions regarding northern Iraq made the correspondence between the two increasingly aggressive. For much of 1987, the state of affairs remained tense because the Turkish military did not consider Iran to be a major factor in its decisions with regard to its actions in northern Iraq, which increasingly bothered Iran. When the Turkish military launched another incursion on March 3rd 1987 against the PKK in northern Iraq, Iran responded by postponing trade talks scheduled for March 8, heightening its rhetoric denouncing Turkish aggression, and labeling Turkey as a supporter of the Saddam regime.90 While Rafsanjani made some efforts to defend relations with Turkey, Iranian authorities warned Turkey about staying on the sidelines of the war and that “Saddam’s weakness should not invite the territorial ambition of other countries.”91 Turkey was defending itself, in its own right, against the PKK through ground incursions into northern Iraq, yet these actions were hurting the Iranian war effort. Security interests therefore were of utmost importance not only for Turkey, but also Iran; both ignored the benefits and necessity of greater economic partnership to persist in their path of guarding security interests.

Iran’s dilemma, between trying to not to antagonize Turkey and guarding its gains in northern Iraq, resulted in a serious security crisis, which demonstrates the overwhelming weight of security interests on both sides. As it was stubbornly trying to break the deadlock militarily, Iran followed the pattern of offering economic incentives to placate Turkey’s concerns and denouncing Turkey’s actions in the meantime. Iran knew that complete fallout with Turkey would jeopardize its wartime interests but Turkey’s continuation on its own trajectory, of

90 Olson, Robert W. Turkey-Iran Relations, 1979-2004: Revolution, Ideology, War, Coups, and Geopolitics., p4
91 Hentov, Elliot. "The Ostensible 'Silent Victor'? The Long-term Impact of the Iran-Iraq War on Turkey, p140
interfering in northern Iraq, also jeopardized its war interests. Turkey was also skeptical of Iran’s intentions and understood that its neutrality was slowly diminishing as the war waged on. In this light, Ozal initiated a diplomatic trip to Tehran in February 1988 where he planned on convincing his Iranian counterparts to accept the UN Security Council Resolution 598. These efforts failed and on March 27, 1988 Iran bombed Habur Gate, the main border crossing between Iraq and Turkey. According to Hentov, the rationale was based on Iraq’s earlier bombing of Turkish Iranian railway inside Iran; nevertheless, Turkish retaliation was far greater as was the perception of threat amongst decision makers.\(^92\) Ankara warned that violation of its airspace would be targeted militarily and began partial mobilization when notified of Iranian advancement towards Suleimaniya, a major Kurdish stronghold. While the intelligence proved to be incorrect, Hentov points out that the mobilization proves the degree of Turkey’s sensitivity at this period.\(^93\) Furthermore, Tehran viewed Turkey’s reaction as an affirmation of Turkey’s return to alliance politics, status as a NATO ally and its American alliance as “being the formative pillars of its foreign policy.”\(^94\) Turkey’s efforts at mediation and declaration of neutrality did not disprove Iran’s perception. Although Turkey ended up contributing fifteen men to the 250-man military observation mission upon UN sponsored ceasefire on August 20 1988\(^95\), the clash in security interests during this period not only reached tremendous heights, but also took a negative toll on the interests governing Turkey’s foreign policy vis-à-vis Iran.

Concluding Remarks

The 1980s serve to verify the hierarchy of interests put forth by Desch. At the beginning of the decade, the two states put aside their ideological differences to pursue greater economic

\(^{92}\) Ibid., p140  
\(^{93}\) Ibid., p139  
\(^{94}\) Ibid., p140  
\(^{95}\) Ibid., p141
relations. Economic incentives impelled Turkey to seek greater economic benefits from interaction with Iran despite differing ideological interests and visions. This shows that economic interests trumped ideological interests. However, as the Kurdish insurgency in northern Iraq and the specter of Islamic fundamentalism spurred by Iran heightened security concerns in Turkey, Turkish-Iranian bilateral initiatives in the economic sphere declined. This confirmed that the security interests trumped economic considerations.

However, the fact that ideological interests, with regard to the suppression of Islamism, began to be perceived as a grave security interest is an interesting occurrence that may challenge Desch’s proposition. On the one hand, the surfacing of ideological tensions as a serious issue only after the emergence of complications in the security and economic arenas may show that the displacement of the uppermost factor on the hierarchy (security) results in sequential fallout on the economic and ideological fronts. On the other hand, it may simply signify that ideological interests may sometimes be of greater importance for a state. In this case, however, the fact that the Turkish republic was under the control of a military deeply committed to Kemalism/secularism meant that Islamic fundamentalism was perceived as a grave existential threat to the regime. Seen in this light, an ideological threat morphed into a security threat. Aside from this issue, the decade of the 1980s largely confirms Desch’s theory as played out in Turkish foreign policy towards Iran.
Chapter Two: Iran—the military’s foe, Demirel’s ally, and Erbakan’s friend

During the 1990s, Turkey’s foreign policy continued to be dictated by the military and its security interests. The military had four overwhelming goals and visions: (1) establish deeper political and economic ties with the newly independent Azeri and Turkic nations in Central Asia and the Caucuses as an alternative to Europe and the Middle East; (2) counter the PKK threat both from within and without; (3) maintain the secular underpinnings of the Turkish republic; (4) and extend Turkey’s security perimeter into northern Iraq while preventing it from emerging as an autonomous entity.

The military’s security focus translated into two areas of tension vis-à-vis Iran, which at this time was an emergent power also looking to extend its influence and power within the region. First there was geopolitical competition with Iran over political and economic influence in central Asia and northern Iraq. Second, Turkey’s efforts to eradicate Islamist and Kurdish nationalist components within Turkey turned up well-grounded suspicions that Iran was supporting the PKK and various Islamist groups in Turkey. Nevertheless, Turkey chose to address internal destabilization through domestic policies so as to not undermine the official security understanding with Iran.

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96 Both areas were going through significant change. The countries of central Asia had just gained independence and northern Iraq was emerging as an autonomous area due to Baghdad’s weakening influence.
As Turkey clamped down on Islamist groups and PKK militants, it saw security cooperation with Iran and especially agreements to contain the PKK and preventing the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish state to be vital. Iran’s concern for growing separationist undercurrents among its Azeri and Kurdish minorities helped in this regard. While this period was marked by highs and lows with regards to mutual suspicion and tension between Turkey and Iran, Turkey was committed to maintaining a stable security understanding with Iran through high-level Joint Security Committee meetings.

Furthermore, ideological tensions ensued and economic relations remained volatile for most of the period. Security interests not only superseded economic interests for most of the period but also defused ideological tensions. However, Turkey’s economic outreach towards Iran between 1996 and 1997, first with the natural gas pipeline deal and later with efforts to increase trade, despite the continuation of suspicions about Iran’s support of the PKK, shows an episode where Desch’s hierarchy can be challenged.

In order to placate the military’s qualms, the governing Welfare Party (WP) maintained that the economic opening being pursued with Iran was for the purpose of strengthening security cooperation in resolving the Kurdish question. However, in light of Prime Minister Erbakan’s broader pan-Islamic and anti-west foreign policy vision, the primary interest behind this foreign policy move was ideological. This interlude illustrates an instance when ideological and economic interests drove foreign policy, despite conflicting security realities.

This decade in Turkey’s relations with Iran mostly validates the portion of Desch’s hierarchy that a state’s security interests trump its economic and ideological interests, with one clear exemption being the 1996-1997 interlude. This chapter will (1) show how Turkey’s security interests drove its foreign policy towards Iran and shaped its relations on the economic
and ideological frontier, and (2) examine the roots causes of the two year deviation in which ideological and economic interests were the primary driver of Turkey’s foreign policy to better understand the instances in which Desch’s hierarchy does not hold. This time period in Turkey’s Iran policy shows that there are exceptions to Desch’s hierarchy.

Ideological interests

While ideology continued to be a source of tension in this period, pragmatic leaders on both sides prevented these events from amounting to a shift in foreign policy. The death of Khomeini in 1990, and the subsequent decreasing revolutionary fervor in Iran also contributed to this end. The rise of political Islam in this period as a legitimate force in Turkish politics and the emergence of various radical Islamist groups in the Turkish social scene had the military concerned. The military was also highly suspicious of potential covert activities by Iran aiming to strengthen these Islamist groups and also Kurdish nationalists.

Turkey sought to prevent Iranian ideological influence within Turkey primarily though domestic policies and measures. Prevalent security interests, namely interest in getting Iran to cooperate in combatting the PKK, prevented ideological issues from emerging as a determinant factor in foreign policy. Turkey’s leaders, especially President Suleyman Demirel, were unwilling to waste limited political capital with Iran on allegations of internal ideological intervention without definitive proof. The fact that suspicions about Iran’s ‘ideological infiltration’ did not result in a breakdown of relations or the formation of a modified foreign policy addressing ideological interests vis-a-vis Iran substantiates the point that in the realm of foreign policy, a state’s ideological interests rank below its security interests.

On the micro level, however, anti-Iran propaganda raged; while Turkey’s foreign policy remained indifferent to such hysteria, it often attempted to use this hype about Iran as leverage in
getting Iran to comply with their security interests. The perception of Iran’s involvement in the rise of radical Islamist groups was fueled by the fact that these groups held deep sympathies for Iran’s Islamic revolution and an ideological affinity to Iran’s governance. Furthermore, the assassination of prominent Turkish figures by people with connections to Iran brought these suspicions to life, most specifically through what is labeled as the “Hizbullah affair.” While there was briefly an expulsion of ambassadors, this issue did not emerge as a significant issue in Turkey’s foreign policy. The understanding that it was in Turkey’s geostrategic interests to sustain healthy relations with Iran was the dominant position.

Erbakan, who became Primer Minister in 1996, was the leader of the Islamist Welfare Party. His ideologically driven foreign policies are a test of the importance of ideology versus other factors shaping foreign policy. Erbakan despised the secular foundations of Turkey and made this very apparent. Through a rejection of traditional western alliances, Erbakan also engaged in a highly activist foreign policy with the Muslim World, often clothed in the guise of economic interests. He saw the international system as serving and being dominated by the interests of the western world. He argued that the Muslim world should have its own institutions, like the UN, a common market, and a unified Islamic currency, the dinar. Erbakan believed that Turkey would lead this process of establishing a transnational Islamic system. He completely rejected deeper engagement with the west, and as such, opposed the EU accession process. Erbakan’s vision was driven entirely by a desire to uplift the Islamic identity. His ideas were radical, especially considering the Turkish republic’s efforts to distance itself from its

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98 In which 92 members were captured and it was revealed that they had been trained in Iran. This issue was accordingly treated by Turkey as a security concern, as will be elaborated in the section on security.
100 Dalay, Galip, and Dov Friedman. "The AK Party and the Evolution of Turkish Political Islam's Foreign Policy.” p124
101 Ibid., p125,
Muslim identity. Thus, under Erbakan, Turkey attempted to establish links with Iran based on ideological interests.

In February 1997, the organization of a “Jerusalem Memorial night” in Sinjan, a small town 40 km from Ankara, caused waves of paranoia from the military and eventually led to the restoration of the military’s distanced and security focused position on Iran.\(^\text{102}\) The “Sinjan Affair,” as labeled by scholars who have described this episode, is the embodiment of the tensions resulting from the shifting foreign policy paradigm under Erbakan’s brief tenure. Erbakan’s policies were not only against the security interests vis-à-vis Iran, but were premised on a radically different identity—Islamist and eastern oriented as opposed to secularist and western oriented. The military’s reaction through the overthrow of Erbakan resulted in the restoration of secularism as the governing ideology but also marked a return to its suspicion prone relations with Iran. Nevertheless, the fact that this event, stemming from ideological clash between Iran and Turkey, did not constitute a radical breakup in foreign policy, but rather a domestic adjustment – the deposition of Erbakan and his party - is in line with the Desch hierarchy.

The event in Sinjan incited a political firestorm in Turkey due to its connection with Iran. For the military, the event highlighted a most frightening prospect: an Islamist revival backed by Iran. The Jerusalem Memorial night was initiated by Khomeini and had previously been held in Iran for the past seventeen years on the last Friday of Ramadan.\(^\text{103}\) The mayor of Sinjan in Turkey, a supporter of Erbakan’s welfare, commenced the organization. The organizers planning the gala put up posters of Islamist political thinkers, and Hezbollah and Hamas leaders in Lebanon. In addition, municipal leaders of Sinjan invited Iranian ambassador Baqeri and the

\(^{102}\) Ibid., p41
\(^{103}\) Olson, Robert W. The Kurdish Question and Turkish-Iranian Relations: From World War I to 1998, p56
PLO representative in Turkey to speak. Alongside criticizing Israel, Baqeri encouraged the crowd to follow the Sharia.\textsuperscript{104} The Turkish military and oppositional parties deemed the event unacceptable. Mesut Yılmaz, the leader of the Motherland party demanded Baqeri and Reza Rashid (Iranian head consul in Istanbul) be sent home immediately and Said Zare, Iranian consul in Erzurum be expelled.\textsuperscript{105}

For the military, the events at Sincan demonstrated the governing Welfare party’s strengthening ideological ties with Iran. The Welfare Party’s efforts to deepen engagement with Iran opposed the strictly pragmatic security interests the military aimed to follow with Iran and clearly only exacerbated the military’s fears regarding the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in Turkey via Iran. While the leadership and followers of Erbakan’s party expressed outright support for the ideological disposition of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and as such, the expression of Islamist rhetoric within Turkish society, the military saw this as an immediate threat to the secular foundation of the state. In effort to counter this potential threat, the military applied severe political pressure on Erbakan, even more so after the events at Sincan. As a result of these pressures, Erbakan was deposed in June 1997, and his party was banned from politics. Relations with Iran rebounded to a security-focused direction.

The Erbakan interlude will be elaborated in the section on economy because much of his foreign policy manifested as economic interest. Nonetheless, whether it was economic interests, as it seems from the outside, or ideological interests, Erbakan’s foreign policy challenges Desch’s hierarchy in significant ways. As will be seen in the section on security, resolving Iran’s involvement with the PKK was a second order interest for Erbakan during his visit to Tehran. Erbakan’s year shows that in a system of democracy, when parties seeking to challenge the status

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p57
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., p57
quo are in control of policy making, they can often be more ideologically oriented in their foreign policy approach.

After Erbakan, ideological interests continued to be overshadowed by security interests. On the eve of the Caferi Crisis, in which the Ministry of Religion in Turkey made serious allegations, based on a series of evidence, of Shiite Imam infiltration into Turkey from Iran. Despite this and the Sinjan affair, Turkey welcomed the new Iranian ambassador in May 1998. The need to bring trade to higher levels was agreed upon, and the PKK was deemed the biggest challenge to this. The crises, driven by ideological differences, were not a topic of discussion. Once again, showing that ideological interests did not influence Turkey’s interest in sustaining pragmatic ties with Iran.

As evident in the Kavakci affair of 1999, the ideological differences between Turkey and Iran caused waves of tensions. Turkey saw Iran as continuing its policy of exporting the revolution to Turkey. Merve Kavakci was subject to a great deal of verbal abuse by other Members of Parliament as she entered the floor with a headscarf upon being elected. When she was compelled to withdraw, Iran severely denounced Turkey for its secular policies; Iranian FM Kamal Kharrazi was especially vocal. Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit subsequently accused Iran of “continuing its efforts to export its revolution and of supporting the PKK in spite of the recent border security arrangements.” The Turkish military and politicians had the option of severing ties with Iran on the basis that Iran was supporting the Islamization of Turkey through various political means if in fact ideological interests dictated Turkey’s foreign policy. However, this was not the case. Turkey’s belief that it was necessary to dissuade Iran from covertly supporting

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107 Ibid., p61
the PKK and gain its cooperation to combat the PKK remained the overriding incentive of foreign policy towards Iran.

Due to the peculiar nature of the Turkish republic, which considers its ideological foundation to be a national security interest to be protected by the military, the ideological conflicts in this period were sometimes communicated on the same plane as security issues. As will be seen in the Hizballah affair—to be explained in the security section—Turkey’s ideological interests had tangible security extensions. These various crises/affairs, however, occurred mainly out of ideological divergence and served to bolster the military’s security concerns. Void of a PKK problem, it is questionable whether these issues would have received attention amongst high-level officials.

**Economic Interests**

In the decade following the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Turkey’s economic relations with Iran went through four different stages; in every stage, except one, security interests overshadowed economic interests. 1989 through 1996 was a period of significant bilateral trade decline; neither Iran nor Turkey was as reliant on each other as they were in the previous decade, as both sought other trading partners to decrease its reliance on the other. The second stage between 1996 and 1997 was marked by an economic rapprochement in the form of a natural gas agreement and increased trade. The third stage between mid 1997 and 1999, trade declined once more. In 1999, trade increased significantly. The shifting trade patterns are at best reflective of the tense relations between the two countries. Overall, aside from the second stage, economic interests in this period were not apparent in Turkey’s foreign policy towards Iran.
In the first stage (89-96), yearly trade volume was on average around $900 million.\textsuperscript{108} Aside from a significant drop to around $576 million in 1991, trade had been steadily decreasing after the peak of $2.3 billion in 1985.\textsuperscript{109} Iran’s transition away from wartime economy alongside its accumulating debt to Turkey, and Turkey’s improved relations with its European trade partners were the immediate reasons for the decline in trade. However, there were three broad interests, which can all be connected back to Turkey’s security interests that prevented the manifestation of an economically motivated foreign policy.

First was the geopolitical rivalry between the two states; each state sought to pull the newly independent countries in Central Asia and the Caucuses into their sphere of influence, and thereby tilt the regional balance of power to be in their favor.\textsuperscript{110} This competition impelled the two states to seek new economic markets and lessen their reliance on the other. Second, while Turkey was determined to stop Iran from cooperating with the PKK, it distrusted Iran’s official commitment to not support the PKK. This thereby lessened Turkey’s motivation to engage with Iran economically.\textsuperscript{111} Third, there was increasing pressure on Turkey from the US to seek alternative routes to energy. As such, Turkey began to search for new trade partnerships and sources of energy. Turkey viewed the oil-rich region for which they were vying for control over as an alternative to Iranian oil; ideas of a gas corridor from the Caspian, which would exclude Iran, to Europe emerged in this period and were widely supported by both the US and Europe.\textsuperscript{112}

The ensuing geopolitical competition and mistrust in the security arena went hand in hand with a lack of desire by officials to further economic interdependence, which arguably would have been at the great benefit of both countries. Turkey, with its growing energy

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 106
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., p120
\textsuperscript{111} Olson, Robert W. Turkey-Iran Relations, 1979-2004: Revolution, Ideology, War, Coups, and Geopolitics, p68
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p125
insecurity, would have especially benefitted from greater energy import from Iran, as Turkey had closed off oil imports from Iraq in bid to comply with the US sanctions on the Saddam regime during the Gulf War. Due to its distrust of Iran, Turkey in this period held the same views as its western allies about avoiding Iran in any Caspian Basin energy pipeline projects. Many in Turkey’s decision making structure saw increased oil revenue to Iran as meaning increased support to the PKK by Iran.\(^\text{113}\) Therefore, in the first stage, the hierarchy is affirmed as economic interests retain its position below security interests.

In 1996, trade reached a level over $1.1 billion for the first time since the 1980s and a deal on the construction of a pipeline between Tabriz and Ankara was struck.\(^\text{114}\) While Prime Minister Erbakan, who spearheaded this initiative, framed these economic ventures as means to improved security cooperation, Erbakan’s background suggests otherwise. Since the revolution, this is the first time ideological interests drove Turkey’s foreign policy vision for Iran, challenging the hierarchy of interests.

While Islamist parties were quickly gaining prominence in Turkish politics at this decade, Erbakan’s 21% victory in parliament was unprecedented, and after establishing a coalition government, he assumed the role of Prime Minister. Erbakan was known to everyone, including officials in Tehran and the military in Turkey, as an ardent supporter and admirer of the Islamic regime in Iran.\(^\text{115}\) His rejection of traditional alliances with Europe, America, and Israel accompanied an aspiration to create an economically unified Muslim bloc to counter western influence.\(^\text{116}\) As such he supported the creation of the D8 (an economic grouping with 8 Muslim countries to provide some alternative to the EU, US and Japanese trading blocs), which included

\[^{113}\] Ibid., p127
\[^{116}\] Dalay, Galip, and Dov Friedman. "The AK Party and the Evolution of Turkish Political Islam's Foreign Policy," p124
Erbakan’s ideological disposition, which can be labeled as pan-Islamism, instigated a shift in Turkey’s foreign policy focus, to an economic opening to Muslim countries in the region.

Erbakan’s trip to Tehran, his first diplomatic travel only six weeks after assuming office, conveys the shifting foreign policy calculus. During the meetings, a pipeline deal was struck, despite US sanctions against Iran, and despite the US’s increasing efforts to leave Iran isolated from the regional energy consortium. The Clinton administration had placed a ban on all transactions with Iran in April 1995. Congress’s passage of the Libya Sanctions Act of 1996 aimed to penalize third party states for investing in Iran. According to this act “all foreign companies providing investments of over $40 million for the development of petroleum resources in Iran would be subject to the imposition of two out of seven possible sanctions by the US.” The natural gas and pipeline agreement signed by Erbakan was $23 billion. While Turkish authorities insisted that this was a trade agreement and not an investment, it is said that US authorities pressured the secular leadership in Ankara to “overthrow Erbakan’s government.” This episode is demonstrative of the length at which Erbakan was committed to furthering relationship with Iran, at the expense of alienating its longstanding US ally.

Erbakan’s economic rapprochement with Iran demonstrates the willingness to turn a blind eye to security interests, one having to do with the PKK, the other being Turkey’s position as a US ally/ NATO member. Upon coming to power, Erbakan conveyed his view that neither Iran nor Syria supported the PKK, linking these allegations to propaganda and a ploy by the CIA to prevent good relations between Muslim countries. Erbakan argued that improved trade

\[117\] Olson, Robert W. *Turkey-Iran Relations, 1979-2004: Revolution, Ideology, War, Coups, and Geopolitics.*, p22
\[119\] Ibid., 166
\[120\] Ibid., 166
\[121\] Olson, Robert W. *Turkey-Iran Relations, 1979-2004: Revolution, Ideology, War, Coups, and Geopolitics, p22.*
relations with Iran would gain Iran’s cooperation to “crush the PKK.” In the perspective of Erbakan who did not see a threat vis-à-vis Iran, security interests were not completely pushed aside. Yet, the existence of solid intelligence by the military and the lack of a significant breakthrough in the PKK deadlock with Iran prove otherwise.

It is known that the PKK was a significant topic of discussion on all diplomatic levels of correspondence during the trip. Erbakan even had private meetings with Rafsanjani solely based on the issue of combatting the PKK. He sought to transform the hostile discourse on Iran by seeing it as a willing partner in achieving Turkey’s security interests. Nevertheless, no significant progress was made with regards to cooperation against the PKK. Still, economic deals were struck. Erbakan felt compelled to at least discuss the PKK problem due to pressures from the military. The military sought to assure that Erbakan could not and did not ignore immediate security interests, however, it could neither prevent the economic deal nor pressure Erbakan to address the Iranian dimension of its ability to strategically combat the PKK. It was only by framing the economic interests in a security framework that the Erbakan government could dodge the military’s pressures and pursue those economic initiatives. At the end of the day, economic interests were fulfilled, whereas security interests were dismissed.

Before Erbakan, all political parties had complied with America’s wishes, for they understood the extent of their reliance on the security capabilities of NATO. On the international level, Erbakan’s policy clearly ignored the security interests of Turkey vis-à-vis NATO through pursuit of friendly relations with Iran. Ideologically motivated economic interests were pursued in spite of security interests. In this sense, it can be concluded that economic interests trumped long term security interests.

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122 Ibid., p22
The third stage and fourth stages of economic relations - decline and subsequent improvement – however, show a definite return to the hierarchy, where security interests serve as the determinant force in policy. Trade with Iran declined after 1997, by about $500 million.\textsuperscript{123} This was right as Turkey’s relations with Iran reached a new low when the documents revealing Iran’s support of the PKK were revealed.\textsuperscript{124}

However, with Syria’s surrender of PKK leader Ocalan to Turkey in 1999, and Turkey’s consolidation of the foreign dimension of the PKK problem, ties relatively stabilized. At this period, trade improved significantly. By 2000, trade volume exceeded $1 billion, a $400 million jump from the 1998 levels.\textsuperscript{125} While there are economic explanations for these trends and it is difficult to find a direct causal link between improved security relations and better economic relations, it is also undeniable that proceedings on the security front of foreign relations severely affected the tide of relations and therefore economic interaction. The waning influence of the Kurdish insurgency after the capture of Ocalan had a direct affect on Turkey’s foreign policy agenda; for the first time, Turkey felt that it had stabilized its security vis-à-vis the PKK.\textsuperscript{126} This naturally enabled it to pursue economic interests at greater height.

Turkey’s efforts to diversify its trade neighbors and seek new trade and energy partners to address its energy needs eventually led to a geopolitical competition with Iran in Central Asia and the Caucuses. While each party could have benefitted from an active trade and energy partnership with its neighbor, Turkey refrained from being in any economic or energy arrangement with Iran for most of the decade and even after the pipeline deal was struck, the actual transfer would only start in 2000/2001 when the construction of the pipeline was finished.

\textsuperscript{124} Olson, Robert W. \textit{Turkey-Iran Relations, 1979-2004: Revolution, Ideology, War, Coups, and Geopolitics}, p63.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p121
Economically both countries directed their attention to the newly independent, oil rich nations of the former Soviet Union in Central Asia and the Caucuses.\textsuperscript{127} Both Turkey and Iran focused on extending a sphere of influence to those countries in an effort to act as a regional hegemon. While Russia emerged as the eventual victor in this effort, this geopolitical competition shaped Turkey’s economic aspirations. Turkey worked to lessen its economic interests vis-a-vis Iran due to deep found suspicions of Iran. It did not want to give an economic leverage that Iran could potentially use against the fragile security interests of Turkey.

**Security Interests**

There were three dimensions to Turkey’s security interests vis-a-vis Iran during this period. All three connected back to Turkey’s effort to quell the PKK. The first had to do with Iran’s involvement in the affairs of northern Iraq, which severely impacted Turkey’s calculations bent on preventing the growth of the PKK throughout the region. Second was Iran’s direct logistical support of the PKK. Third was the convergence of interests between Turkey and Iran with regard to northern Iraq. Turkey’s security interests resulted in an odd amalgamation of extreme suspicion and distrust of Iran’s intentions, proxy war and competition in northern Iraq, all the while continuing high level meetings aimed at security cooperation. Nevertheless, security interests constituted a bulk of Turkey’s policies towards Iran in this period, and drove the nature of relations on the economic and ideological arena.

Despite all suspicions regarding Iran’s covert activities with the PKK and Islamist resurgence in Turkey, Turkey’s leaders saw cooperation as a strategic necessity.\textsuperscript{128} Turkey could not simply launch ground incursions, as it did in northern Iraq, to target the PKK in Iranian territory. While border security agreements and arrangements were signed and joint activities

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., p120
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p53
were agreed upon, relations did not thrive and went through severe fluctuations. At one point Iran handed over PKK militants to Turkey\textsuperscript{129} and at another point, documents revealed that Iran was providing logistical support to the PKK.\textsuperscript{130} A relationship of trust was never built; both countries approached each other with increasing pessimism and scrutiny over the possibility that the other could covertly be supporting separationist factions within their respective countries. Aside from Erbakan’s policies, whether it was cooperation or hostility towards Iran, security interests defined Turkey’s foreign policy towards Iran.

Turkey believed that control over northern Iraq, due to Baghdad’s weakened authority over the region, was essential in its effort to quell the PKK.\textsuperscript{131} The power vacuum allowed various Kurdish groups to flourish, and the PKK often drew strength from the instability. As in the previous decade, Turkey launched several ground incursions into northern Iraq, which were unchallenged by the Kurdish parties in northern Iraq due to the PKK’s fallout with the KDP, and Turkey’s alliance with the KDP and cordial relations with the rival Kurdish Party PUK. Turkey’s working alliances with the two main Kurdish groups, the KDP and PUK, was in exchange for their loyalty in resisting the PKK.

Tehran perceived Turkey’s influence, political or economic in northern Iraq to be at the expense of its regional interests. This resulted in continual proxy clashes between Turkey and Iran in northern Iraq. Ankara’s tightened alliance with KDP in 1992, due to the inception of full-scale war between the KDP and the PKK, led Tehran to strengthen its support of the PKK, both in Iran and in northern Iraq.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 81
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 54
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., p5
To elaborate, Tehran believed that Turkey’s cordial relations with Kurdish groups in northern Iraq would move Turkey’s security border to the south and east. This would mean direct Turkish influence along its border with the Kurdish-Azeri population for more than two hundred miles. Iran had a sizeable Azeri population, ten million in total and 16.5% percent of Iran’s overall population in 1996. Historically, the greatest challenge to Iran’s territorial integrity was the establishment of any sovereign Azeri state. In this period, the collapse of the Soviet Union brought about an Azeri state and exacerbated Iran’s concern over the spread of Azeri nationalism into its own Azeri population. On top of this, Iran also had to deal with its own Kurdish population, which was around six million. Iran’s interest in inhibiting separatism, and its dealings in northern Iraq, were even more obfuscated when in 1993 Iran’s own separatist Kurdish group KDPI (Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan) emerged as a serious problem. These developments led to a relative convergence of security interests between Iran and Turkey, as Iran was less inclined to support separatist factions that would set precedent to similar requests within its own population.

Nevertheless, it was in this period of active competition in northern Iraq that Turkey took steps to foster security cooperation with Iran. The simultaneous nature of these diametrically opposed attitudes - cooperation and competition - however, is not unusual in the realm of foreign policy. Both trends relate back to national security interests; Turkey wanted to curtail the advancement of PKK by supporting and maintaining influence over Kurdish factions in northern Iraq. Iran also wanted to maintain its own sphere of influence in Northern Iraq. The US led coalition in the 1990 Gulf War against Saddam exacerbated Turkey’s Kurdish problem and compelled Turkey to cooperate with Iran on matters of security, namely in preventing the

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132 Ibid., p5
133 Ibid., p6
emergence of an independent Kurdish state. This cooperation was sustained in various degrees throughout the decade.

The events in northern Iraq during this decade were shaped by Turkey’s security interests vis-à-vis Iran. While Turkey previously avoided conflicts in the Middle East, President Ozal broke this tradition in 1990 when he sided with the US led coalition confronting Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait. Turkey complied with the economic sanctions on Iraq by closing down the two pipelines connecting to Iraq, deployed 150,000 troops along its border with Iraq, and authorized the US to use its Incirlik airbase. Nevertheless the 1991 Kurdish rebellion in northern Iraq, which the Saddam government brutally repressed, resulted in a mass exodus of the entire Kurdish population of northern Iraq toward the Iranian and Turkish borders.

The emergent Kurdish refugee problem would have had severe impact on both Turkey and Iran, as both were attempting to stabilize their economies. Turkey closed its border and supported a solution that would allow the Kurdish refugees to return home, with guarantees of safety. Britain, France and the US produced an agreement in June 1991 for the establishment of an interim protected zone in northern Iraq - all Iraqi military activities would be blocked in this zone. Turkey permitted its allies to use the Incirlik base for armed reconnaissance flights over the protected zone. Although the agreement created a de facto safe haven in Iraq’s three northern provinces and prompted a majority of the Kurdish refugees to return home, it did not resolve the political problem between the refugees and the Iraqi government. Baghdad responded by imposing a blockade on the north, making the Kurds economically dependent on Iran and Turkey.

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135 Ibid., p71
136 Ibid., p5
137 Ibid., p70.
138 The interim period was planned to be for six months and could be extended for another six months.
The western powers saw Iraq’s actions as justifying prolongation of the safe haven agreement; as of 1995, the arrangement was still in force and it seemed that the continuation of this arrangement would eventually lead to the creation of an autonomous Kurdish government in northern Iraq.\textsuperscript{140} Turkey and Iran wholly opposed such possibility on the premise that this would encourage separationist currents in their own territories; the Kurds in Turkey and the Azeris and Kurds in Iran. Nevertheless, the formation of a local administration was inevitable, as the US and the UN wanted to limit their involvement in the safe zone.\textsuperscript{141}

Both Turkey and Iran had to comply with the US and European support for the creation of autonomous entity in northern Iraq, yet both agreed that it was not in their security interests.\textsuperscript{142} From 1993 onwards, despite their differences Turkey joined Iran and Syria to sign a series of security protocols to prevent the emergence of a Kurdish state and Kurdish nationalist movements in the region, and also to prevent Europe from intervening in their internal affairs. The security measures required a meeting at the foreign ministerial level every six months, with more frequent meetings at the lower levels.

In November 1993, the first protocol was signed, delineating that neither country would allow any terrorist organization (the PKK) to exist on its territory. The representative of President Rafsanjani, Golam Hosseini Bolandijian promised that Iran would take measures against the PKK.\textsuperscript{143} On 4 May 1994, Ankara announced that Iran turned over twenty-eight members of the PKK to Turkey, ten of which were dead corpses. Shortly after, on 13 June Ankara requested during the visit of Iranian interior minister that Turkey be allowed to bomb PKK bases around the areas of Mt Arafat and Mt Tendurek in and near Iranian territory. The day after,

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., p134
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., p135
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p135
\textsuperscript{143} Elik, Suleyman. Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011: Conceptualising the Dynamics of Politics, Religion, and Security in Middle-power State, p90.
President Suleyman Demirel announced that Ankara and Tehran agreed to cooperate in combating the PKK. The two parties had agreed on three points: “PKK members must be prevented from passing from northern Iraq to Iran; PKK members must be stopped from passing to Armenia and thence to Russia; and Turkey would be allowed to bomb roads in Iranian territory that were used by the PKK to replenish supplies for their camps in Iran from which they were launching attacks against Turkey.”

In turn, President Demirel addressed Iran’s concerns over the US’s support for anti-Iranian groups in Turkey, since the Clinton administration had approved a $20 million covert plan to destabilize the Iranian government. Turkey assured that it would move against the Iranian Mojahadin-e Khalq (MEK) opposition based in Turkey and would not allow any groups working against the Iranian government to operate in Turkey. By September 1994, ten high level security meetings took place; the main topic was how “each country could best control those groups threatening their regimes.” The establishment of a security commission, and actual diplomatic initiatives based upon this is indicative of the overwhelming nature of Turkey’s security interests in the beginning of the period.

Along this line, during this phase, President Demirel in Turkey continuously struck down propaganda against Iran, and prevented such propaganda from taking life on the political level, in effort to defend Turkey’s security interests. Demirel even attended the OIC conference in Tehran in 1997, despite it being the height of the media firestorm in both countries. The fact that Turkey cooperated with Iran and Syria, despite the continuation of long withstanding

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145 Elik, Suleyman. Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011: Conceptualising the Dynamics of Politics, Religion, and Security in Middle-power State, p90  
147 Ibid., p19  
148 Ibid., p75
suspicions about Iran’s efforts to export the revolution underlines the importance of a state’s security interests, in line with Desch’s hierarchy.

Furthermore, for the first time in decades, a Turkish president visited Tehran in July 1994. The meeting between Demirel and Rafsanjani was meant to deal with the Kurdish challenge. Rafsanjani stated in press statements, that Iran was fully cooperative with Turkey regarding the PKK and that the “creation of a Kurdish state was impossible.” Along with newly made agreements with Syria, Turkey believed that the capture of the PKK leader Ocalan was imminent. Turkish Iranian relations improved in 1995, only for a short period. In this framework, a seventh tripartite meeting between Iran Turkey and Syria, at the foreign minister level, reaffirmed their position that the territorial integrity of Iraq should be protected at all costs. In the meeting, mutual concern was expressed regarding the stockpiling of weapons in northern Iraq. Although names were not given, both countries affirmed their position against terrorism. President Demirel approved these decisions and announced that Turkey was not in competition with Iran. Iran continually expressed its desire to further economic cooperation with Turkey, however, discussions on economic expansion were not held.

This cooperation existed simultaneously with competition in northern Iraq. As Baghdad’s influence over northern Iraq diminished, there emerged areas where Ankara and Tehran wanted to exert their sphere of influence. The situation worsened as rival Kurdish factions in northern Iraq, the KDP and the PUK, began to clash more frequently. The KDP drew closer to Turkey and the PUK to Iran. Due their economic reliance on the respective parties, each Kurdish group became the proxy of its neighbor benefactor. Interestingly this did not change Turkey’s foreign

149 Ibid., p15
150 Elik, Suleyman. Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011: Conceptualising the Dynamics of Politics, Religion, and Security in Middle-power State, p90
policy position aimed at achieving security cooperation with Iran and preventing it from supporting the PKK and radical/armed Islamist groups in Turkey.

Contributing to the distrust of Iran in Turkey, especially by the military, were the high profile murders that were linked back to Iran through Islamist groups. For example, Ugur Mumcu, a leading writer, journalist, secularist, was murdered on January 24, 1993 with a bomb set in his car.\textsuperscript{152} Allegations emerged that a right wing Islamist organization carried out his murder and that Iranian operatives executed the plot. President Demirel approached the issue with pragmatism and stated “we must be very careful and have very accurate information before attributing any blame to Iran as a state.”\textsuperscript{153} Once again, this shows how overall security interests shaped Turkey’s foreign policy, even at highly tense moments.

The spokesman at the Iranian embassy denied any involvement but the MEK members living in Turkey asserted that Iran carried out fifty assassinations in Turkey. Relations were once again complicated in February 1993 when nineteen Turkish Islamist radicals were arrested and their papers showed numerous travels to Iran alongside ties to Iran’s security forces, going as far as the 1970s.\textsuperscript{154} Prime Minister Demirel, a pragmatist, however continued to insist that it was critical to maintain stability at this time, and the tripartite security meetings took precedence to Iran’s alleged support for Islamist groups in Turkey. Demirel, instead of implicating these issues into the foreign policy agenda, chose to deal with the emergence of Islamists through domestic measures. After these incidents, the next security meeting scheduled for the same month took place, showing how strategic security interests trumped ideologically driven concerns. Demirel understood that Iran’s cooperation was necessary to realistically defeat the PKK in Iran.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., p20
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., p19
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., p20
Moreover, the desire to pursue the establishment of a sound security partnership vis-a-vis the PKK survived even with evidence coming forth on Iran’s involvement with the PKK. In August 1994, a Turkish delegation went to Tehran with documents on “terrorist” activities in Turkey against Turkey by PKK operatives supported by Iran.  

According to Turkey, Iran was once again meddling with its internal affairs. Turkey had photos, tapes, and files with confessions from captured PKK operatives on their ties with Iran’s intelligence and the Revolutionary Guards (Pasdaran units), alongside data on PKK arms depots, training centers, offices, and names of PKK members in charge of camps and cell houses in Iran. In June 1995, Ankara accused Iran of allowing the PKK to establish more bases in Iran after they fled from Turkey’s ground incursion in northern Iraq. The rest of 1995 was marked with Turkey’s growing suspicions that Tehran was encouraging Islamists in Turkey and allowing the PKK to consolidate activities in northern Iraq. Iran however maintained its plausible deniability, so policy dealings were not impacted.

On 23 February 1996, a secret Military Training and Cooperation Agreement with Israel was signed. The principle motive of this agreement was the PKK. In addition to receiving valuable intelligence capabilities and improving military and technical capabilities, Turkey wanted to send a message to regional supporters of the PKK, Iran and Syria. Despite the degree of opposition and threat Turkey perceived towards its immediate neighbors and their support of the PKK, Erbakan went directly to Iran shortly after assuming power.  

As mentioned in the section on economic interests, the necessity to further and stabilize security cooperation, and address these allegations was ignored by Erbakan in place of economic  

155 Ibid., p21  
156 Ibid., p21  
157 Ibid., p21  
rapprochement. The discord between the foreign policy being pursued by the military and Erbakan were apparent from the beginning. For example, an expert remarked that:

“While the government was trying to make overtures to the Islamic countries such as the signing of a pipeline deal with Iran and to realize Erbakan's dream of establishing an Islamic commonwealth, during Erbakan's official visit to Libya, General Çevik Bir, who was perceived as the "foreign minister" of the armed forces at that time, was simultaneously accusing Iran of being a "terrorist state" in a speech he delivered in the US. Thus, the so-called "Turkish-Israeli axis" was initiated, negotiated and, to a great extent, conducted by the Turkish Armed Forces.”

After the ouster of Erbakan in 1997, however, the following Prime Ministers Yilmaz and Ecevit were nationalists and secularists; in line with the military, both portrayed extreme hostility towards Iran. Ecevit accused Iran of trying to export the Islamic revolution and continuing to support the PKK.

Furthermore, in the period immediately after Erbakan’s replacement, the Turkish government conducted a crackdown on the Turkish Hezbollah. According to Turkish officials, the leaders of Hezbollah “received political and military training from Iranian security and intelligence forces, worked as spies for the Iranian government and were involved in political killings in Turkey during the 1990s.” At this period, the evidence pointing to Iran’s covert activities in Turkey had deteriorated any existing efforts for security cooperation. Any sort of political and economic interest did not manifest in the form of foreign policy. Turkey, however, never resorted to force, despite its firm belief that Iran supported the PKK. Turkish generals and President Demirel maintained the long standing understanding that any conflict with Iran would be geopolitically crippling.

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159 Uzgel, Ilhan. "Between Praetorianism and Democracy: The Role of the Military in Turkish Foreign Policy," p205
161 Özcan, Nihat Ali, and Özgür Özdamar. "Uneasy Neighbors: Turkish-Iranian Relations Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution," p110
During the 1990s, Turkey’s relations with Iran were mired with the PKK problem. According to Turkish intelligence, Iran had fifty PKK bases in its territory. The Iranian Revolution Guard (IRG) was involved in training twelve hundred guerillas every year at these camps. Iran allowed the PKK to operate offices in six cities and maintain shortage facilities in the Maku Dumbat region. PKK officials living in Iran were given official residence. Iran also provided the use of hospital facilities, printing of promotional material and transport of PKK guerillas via military aircraft to the Turkish border. In addition, Turkey understood that Iran made logistics deliveries, including medical and food supplies to PKK camps in the mountains of Iran. While, the Iranian foreign ministry rejected such activities, Erbakan’s willingness to engage with Iran at such heights was therefore a shocking move for the military. Turkey therefore maintained constant diplomatic pressure regarding this issue, especially in the latter half of the decade, after 1997.

Turkey’s commitment to stable security relations with Iran, however, went through a severe test in the summer of 1999 when Iran accused Turkish fighter aircrafts of bombing several cites in Iran, killing five. This happened just as Iran was experiencing nationwide protests; Iran believed that Turkey and Israel were supporting these protests. Iran even as far as to say “we reserve the right to retaliate.” Turkey rejected claims that Turkey had invaded Iran. Ecevit responded, “if we had intended to invade Iran, we would not have done so with two soldiers.” Despite heightened rhetoric on both sides, the parties reached a diplomatic resolution by sending delegations to the site of the bombing. On August 10, Iranian Deputy Interior minister,

163 Ibid., p88.
164 Ibid., p89
166 Ibid., p53.
commented in Ankara “I want the whole world to know that Turkish-Iranian ties are gradually growing. The temporary dispute has ended.”\textsuperscript{167} In fact, another security cooperation agreement and a border security arrangement were signed during this meeting. Turkey’s interest in maintaining stable relations with its neighbor proved to be an unshakable component to its foreign policy.

Interestingly, the accusations from politicians and the media in Turkey regarding Iran’s contribution in supporting the PKK throughout the years reached an ultimate high in 1999. Ecevit in Turkey proclaimed that Iran must take responsibility for the crimes by both Islamist radicals and PKK militants with training in Iran.\textsuperscript{168} Iranian Foreign Minister Kharrazi then labeled this as interference in internal affairs and that Islamist and separationist trends within Turkey cannot be attributed to Iran. Ecevit was clearly motivated by ideological interests when leading this harsh rhetoric against Iran. However, pragmatists in Turkey continued their belief that cooperation with Iran for security sakes was necessary. This further demonstrated the significance of security interests over ideological motives.

The surrender of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in 1998 by Syria and Turkey’s capture of him in 1999 led to a convergence in security interests between Turkey and Iran regarding the PKK. After Ocalan’s capture, region-wide Kurdish demonstrations and unrest ensued. Tehran then realized the influence PKK had over the Kurds in Iran.\textsuperscript{169} Out of fear for the emergence of a general Kurdish movement in the region and the inclusion of Iran’s Kurds in this separatist effort, Iran significantly decreased and eventually suspended its support of the PKK.\textsuperscript{170} As such, the possibility of an American attack on Iraq, and the weakened control of Baghdad over its

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., p55.  
\textsuperscript{169} Özcan, Nihat Ali, and Özgür Özdamar. "Uneasy Neighbors: Turkish-Iranian Relations Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, p110.  
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., p110.
territories worried both Iran and Turkey. The period ended on a high note of converged security interests, providing a stable basis for Turkey’s long sought effort to get Iran to fully cooperate against the PKK.

Concluding Remarks

Despite the various fluctuations in Turkey’s relations with Iran, Turkey’s foreign policy remained security oriented in this decade. Security interests - whether through competition in northern Iraq, or through cooperation with Iran regarding the PKK, or rampant anger about Iran’s support of the PKK and meddling in internal affairs - defined every aspect of Turkey’s foreign policy. This period validates the positioning of security interests at the top of Desch’s hierarchy for foreign policy, save for the period between 1996 and 1997 in which economic and ideological interests trumped security interests.

In the period before and after Erbakan’s government, ideology was important but did not define foreign policy. Concerns over Iran’s covert support of Islamic extremism in Turkey were very real for Turkey, especially the military, however, the threat of Islamic extremism was always secondary to security calculations concerning Iran and the PKK. Political figures often sought to deal with these concerns through internal measures, as made evident in the Sinjan affair and the Kavakci affair. Due to raging security problems with Iran, economic interests were not pursued, for the military believed that any economic benefit that Iran received from Turkey would eventually be used to support the PKK. These factors show that economic interests and ideological interests were bound to the nature of security interests, and thereby affirm the hierarchy.

\[^{171}\text{Ibid., p110}\]
The divergence of security interests in this period ensured that security interests serve as the utmost determinant of Turkey’s foreign policy, as stated in Desch’s hierarchy. Nevertheless, Erbakan ignored the divergence to pursue an ideologically and economically driven foreign policy towards Iran. While Erbakan argued that deeper economic engagement would serve as a deterrent for Iran’s support of the PKK, security interests were clearly overlooked. Erbakan’s policies are an instance in which security interests were not at the top of the foreign policy hierarchy.

The economic and ideological direction of Erbakan’s foreign policy has revealed that security interests can be ignored through an altered threat perception of the governing class. For Erbakan, the US, not Iran, was the enemy. And through economic inducements, he not only sought to challenge the inner (the military) and outer enemy (the dominance of western culture) but declared Turkey’s loyalty to be on the side of Iran and the Muslim World.

Erbakan’s tenure lasted only a year but deeply challenged the unity of the state’s policies. This conflict of interests between the two prominent institutions, the government and the military, resulted in a diverging set of interests vis-à-vis Iran within Turkey. The lack of cooperation between the two institutions has almost always, as in the case of Erbakan, resulted in military intervention in politics. Erbakan’s disregard for the military’s security interests in place of his distinct approach resulted from a combination of Erbakan’s deeply held grudge against and mistrust of the military, and interest in establishing an Islamic community within the international realm.
Chapter Three: Everlasting Friendship?

As a decade of political change in Turkey, the first ten years of the 20th century constituted a significant shift in Turkey’s foreign policy paradigm, especially vis-à-vis Iran. The realization of Turkey’s geostrategic potential within the 2002 Justice and Development Party (AKP) government marked an idealistic determination to rise to global, if not regional, prominence through a dynamic foreign policy. The utilization of economic ventures in former Ottoman provinces was key in establishing “soft power,” and the “zero problems with neighbors” policy was to result in improved economic and security relations with Iran and Syria.\(^\text{172}\)

Unlike the previous decade, there were domestic institutional changes that allowed this process to prosper. As the military gradually withdrew from politics, geostrategic calculations and foreign policy authority transferred to the ruling party, the AKP. In contrast to the military institution that held deep prejudice for unstable Muslim regimes, the AKP identified more closely with Muslim countries, but most specifically, with countries that would balance the growing US hegemony.

The PKK question raged within Turkey, but its international dimension diminished, as Iran and Syria began to consider the PKK a threat to their own interests. In fact, Turkey acted with Syrian and Iranian forces to combat the PKK in their territories. With the US occupation of Iraq in 2003, Iran’s competition in northern Iraq also diminished, marking an elimination of an immediate security concern vis-à-vis Iran. Lastly, Turkey’s energy needs became critical to the AKP’s economic vision.

At the unit level, a convergence of Turkey and Iran’s ideological, economic, and security interests can be seen. For this period between 2000-2010, it is impossible to adjudicate which of

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\(^{172}\) Murinson, Alexander. "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy,” p953.
these interests dominate or whether there is a hierarchy of interests because economic, ideological, and security interests all point at the same direction—to build stronger relations with Iran.

Nevertheless, Turkey’s growing economic ties to Iran, despite US opposition, and its lack of resistance to Iran’s nuclear program exhibit an undermining of long-term security interests. For Turkey in this period only short-term security considerations were important in foreign policy, as Turkey and Iran became partners in combatting the PKK. Long-term security interests, namely its position as a member of NATO, were not emphasized in foreign policy. This may have been due to the lack of an immediate threat from Iran with potential to result in an actual conflict. Yet, deepening economic interdependence with Iran, and a diverging position from the West’s opposition to Iran’s potential nuclear build-up, exhibited that Turkey prioritized its economic interests and security relations in the immediate neighborhood over its commitment to the Atlantic Alliance. This, however, is not a clear trump of economic interests over security interests.

This chapter will show how ideological, economic, and security interests between Turkey and Iran converged within the period between 2000-2010 and constituted an amicable foreign policy towards Iran. In addition, this chapter will explore whether Turkey’s stance on Iran’s nuclear program indicates an instance where security interests were undermined for economic interests.

**Ideological Interests**

While minor ideological tensions ensued in the first two to three years of the decade, these tensions ceased after AKP’s victory in 2002. Although the AKP claimed to be a secular party with secular ambitions in all levels of policy making, it also stressed that its members were
devout Muslims. The party had roots in political Islam and advocated a Pan-Islamic paradigm in foreign policy.\textsuperscript{173} Like Erbakan in the previous decade, Erdogan (the leader of AKP) fostered a discourse based on the conflict of interests between east and west.\textsuperscript{174} The AKP, however, sought to present itself as a bridge between these two regions. This would not only highlight its strategic value to the west but also situate it as a leader in the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{175} The latter goal required the upholding of and adherence to the Islamic principles of the Turkish population. Therefore, the tensions having to do with Turkey’s secularism and Iran’s Islamism faded in this period. An understanding of this ideological transition is key to seeing how, for the first time since the Iranian revolution, Iran and Turkey did not experience ideological tensions. This factor provided the basis of a friendly foreign policy vis à-vis Iran.

The political Islam ideology brought Turkey closer to Iran despite the Sunni-Shiite divide. This was because the AKP was driven more by the desire to afford Islam a place in Turkish politics and society as opposed to promoting a specific type of Islam. Furthermore, the AKP saw the international realm mostly through the divide of Islam versus non-Islam, and therefore disregarded the sectarian divisions within the Islamic world. Especially in terms of regional politics, Iran and Turkey were not at odds on a sectarian premise. Turkey’s friendly relation with Syria also shows its disregard of sectarian differences. Turkey’s cordial relations with Hamas certainly helped in blurring its sectarian differences with Iran. The Sunni-Shiite divide in this period was insignificant in Turkey’s foreign policy.

After a decade of actively banned Islamist parties, the new generation of political Islamists understood that they could not denounce Turkey’s long lasting relationship with the

\textsuperscript{173} Dalay, Galip, and Dov Friedman.  "The AK Party and the Evolution of Turkish Political Islam's Foreign Policy," p124
\textsuperscript{174} Murinson, Alexander.  "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy," p960.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., p961.
west. Unlike Erbakan, the leaders of AKP devised their foreign policy in a way that aimed to situate Turkey as a key player in the affairs of its immediate neighborhood, and in the West. AKP’s foreign policy aimed to be a hybrid of two different models; it would continue the process of westernization and modernization initiated by Ataturk, but it would also pursue its relationship with the east. This stance balanced the concerns of the secular elites and the military while the AKP pursued its mission to the Turkic-Islamic world.\textsuperscript{176} Nevertheless, this vision did not calculate the potential conflict of interest generated by sustaining opposing commitments and loyalties in the two regions.

The core doctrine of AKP’s new foreign policy direction, “strategic depth” was coined by Ahmet Davutoglu -- initially the chief foreign policy advisor of the AKP leadership, and later the minister of foreign affairs – in his book published in 2000. In this book that serves as the blueprint for AKP’s foreign policy vision, Davutoglu framed current and future international affairs based on historic and geographic facts. He made the case that centers of power and civilization have historically belonged to the Muslim world in order to argue that the Muslim community, if its acts in a unified manner, has potential to rise from its position of subjugation to the west.\textsuperscript{177} Accordingly, Turkey’s particular position of advantage, alongside its historic legacy from the Ottoman Empire, destined Turkey for success and leadership in the Muslim context. This line of thinking gave way to a foreign policy seeking to ensure Turkey’s leadership position in the region, which would require healthy relationships with, first and foremost, its neighbors.

In the section on Iran within his book, Davutoglu asserted that Iran not only shares geographical features with Turkey (being able to belong to different geographies and serving as a

\textsuperscript{176} Dalay, Galip, and Dov Friedman. “The AK Party and the Evolution of Turkish Political Islam’s Foreign Policy,” p127.

\textsuperscript{177} Murinson, Alexander. “The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy,” pgs947-948.
crossroads between civilizations) but also that Iran is strategically tied to Anatolia. He implied that the US or Europe cannot determine the tide of Turkey’s relationship with Iran, or any of its neighbors, by writing,

“the fact that distant world powers are regarded as the determinate factors in regional affairs is against realpolitik and historical realities… the history of the Turkey-Iran border (1639 Kasri Sirin agreement) is older than America’s history (1774) and the unification of Germany (1871). Turkey-Iran relations are a determinant factor in the balance of the Middle East.”

He further states that Iran’s position as a route to three different regions of the world makes the “consideration of the Iran factor a strategic imperative.” In this section, Davutoğlu sets out clear denunciation of Western attitudes, alongside confidence that good relations with Iran are inevitable due to deeply rooted cultural and historical precedents.

Turkey’s new ideological angle was a significant turn in foreign policy. While there were leaders in the past that promoted pan-Turkic ideals, the general understanding in Turkey, as guarded by the military, was that Turkey belonged to Europe politically. The AKP altered this understanding, advocating an opening to countries in the Muslim world and political groups committed to political Islam; as such, Iran fit into this vision.

While the secular ideological foundations of Turkey remained after the ascendance of the AKP, the worldview of AKP was Islamic. Key members of the AKP were part of the openly Islamist parties that had been previously banned by the military. Although the AKP’s domestic policies were restrained, it is beyond doubt that the AKP despised Ataturk and Turkey’s

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178 Davutoğlu, Ahmet. Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu, p427
179 Ibid., p434
180 Ibid., p426.
181 Cagaptay, Soner. "The AKP's Foreign Policy: The Misnomer of "Neo-Ottomanism"
secularism, which they believe have long suppressed devout Muslims—their electoral base. Erdogan, the leader of the AKP, also a student of Erbakan, made public statements against the secular foundations of the state. Erdogan early on in his political career had in fact been imprisoned for reading a poem with Islamic imagery and a longing for religious values in the state. Like the leaders of Iran, Erdogan often avoided going to commemoration ceremonies of Ataturk, often citing sickness and ill health. Furthermore, AKP leaders occasionally made statements about Erdogan being the “representative of the 1.5 billion Muslims of the world.” Nevertheless, the AKP avoided flagrant Islamist oriented remarks or policies in this period.

The basis of ideological disposition among key Turkish foreign policymakers in this period was demonstrated in one of Prime Minister Erdogan’s speeches—he said, “the Muslim world is an autonomous and peculiar geopolitical region where Turkey could be influential diplomatically and assume a primary role.” This understanding climaxed in the latter half of this period. Erdogan stated for example that “biz bize yeteriz!” Literally meaning, “we are sufficient for ourselves.” His point was that if all obstacles were lifted, fifty-seven Muslim countries, together with their production, capabilities, and brainpower, could reach a level of self-sufficiency. Members of the AKP therefore supported better ties with Iran because of its Muslim identity, despite the Sunni-Shiite divide between the two.

The AKP’s orientation towards the Muslim world and support of political Islam meant that for the first time since the Iranian revolution, Turkey shared significant political positions with Iran. Iran and Turkey found a like cause in the Palestinian cause. Both were against the

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182 The AKP’s Political Islamist potential was realized after 2010, when the government made active strides for the Islamization of Turkish society and adopted a more anti-west and “Islamist” rhetoric. One notable example is the turning of public schools into religious schools or limiting the purchase of alcohol.
183 Middle East Quarterly. "Does Prime Minister Erdoğan Accept Turkish Secularism?"
186 Ibid., np
187 Cagaptay, Soner. "The AKP's Foreign Policy: The Misnomer of “Neo-Ottomanism”"
headscarf ban in Turkey. The AKP did not hold back from expressing anti-Israel sentiments. Lastly, the AKP’s EU bid was effectively eliminating the military’s hold on politics, which had been the bulwark of secularism. Ideologically, Turkey and Iran were on the same page. Believing that the rise of the AKP would alleviate the ideological tensions between the countries, Iran also welcomed the party’s victory, regarding it as a “victory for Islam in Turkey.” As such, high level diplomatic visits became commonplace between the countries.

Furthermore, at the onset of Iraq’s occupation, Turkey joined Iran in opposing US interventionism in the region, suspicious of renewed “colonial” ambitions. In addition, a Turkish leader for the first time vocally expressed deep support for the Palestinian cause. Erdogan’s outburst against Simon Peres at the Davos convention regarding the oppression of Palestinians underlined his desire to elevate Turkey to a position to speak on behalf of the Muslim people, and to use an anti-Israeli rhetoric to build support on the Arab street. Turkey in turn sought to distance itself from Israel politically (although it has never officially done so). Turkey also worked to foster good relations with Syria, Iran’s unshakable ally in the region, as well as a relationship with Qatar and Hamas.

Ahmet Davutoglu’s neo-liberal viewpoint is essential to understanding Turkey’s shifting foreign policy paradigm and its rapprochement with Iran. Davutoglu believed that strengthening Turkey’s economic ties with other countries would sustain peace and build Turkey’s “soft power.” This in turn would permit Turkey to have indirect political influence over the respective countries and eventually establish Turkey as a leader in the region. This belief underlay the

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188 While ideology was not the driving force of foreign policy in the past two decades when military exercised significant power in politics, it certainly contributed to the mistrust of Iran’s intentions.
189 Dalay, Galip, and Dov Friedman. “The AK Party and the Evolution of Turkish Political Islam’s Foreign Policy,” p127.
192 The Turkish military continued its coordination with Israel.
193 Ibid., p16
AKP’s vision of a neighborhood with “zero problems,” and established an ideological drive to greater economic interdependence with Iran.

The AKP’s foreign policy also encouraged engagement with other countries, such as the US and Gulf Countries. This was in conflict with Iran’s interests. Nevertheless, there was no event within this period that manifested this conflict of interest. Both countries preferred to focus on their ideological similarities as opposed to their differences in order to foster a working relationship.194

**Economic Interests**

Economically, as Turkey embarked on active urbanization and industrialization, its energy needs became all the more apparent. It seemed only natural for Turkey to utilize its energy-rich proximate neighbors. Even before the AKP came to power, President Sezer’s monumental visit to both Tehran and Tabriz on June 17, 2002195 signaled the importance of this economic driver to Turkey’s foreign policy vis-à-vis Iran. Having made the trip with a large delegation of businessmen, Sezer spoke extensively with president Khatami and vice president Mohammad Reza on improving trade relations.196197

It was the need for Iran’s energy that impelled Turkey to sustain its unabated levels of trade with Iran, despite US sanctions. Just as Erbakan had ignored the limits the US tried to impose on trade with Iran when making the pipeline deal in 1996, the AKP also ignored these limitations in the 2000s, and even found ways around the restrictions.198 This was party because, economically, Turkey had understood how crippling it was to abide by US sanctions when it had

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194 It is only after the beginning of the Arab spring that these differences begin to signal tension.
196 Security issues were the focal point of the talks.
197 Ibid.,
cut off all trade with Iraq during the first Gulf War. The latter had played a direct role in shaping Turkey’s economic crisis in 1999.\(^{199}\) As was the case with ideological interests, economic interests also pointed toward amicable relations between Turkey and Iran. This makes a judgment on the hierarchy of interests rather difficult.

Iran and Turkey had complementary economic resources: Iran had an abundant supply of oil and gas, whereas Turkey was completely dependent on energy imports. Sanctions, far from being an impediment to economic relations between the two countries, brought the two countries together through investment and trade of non-oil goods.\(^{200}\) By the end of 2010, Iran was the leading exporter of crude oil to Turkey, comprising 30 percent of Turkey’s total oil imports and being the third largest natural gas provider to Turkey.\(^{201}\) With rising price of natural gas and oil, alongside increasing volume of trade, the value of Turkey’s imports from Iran rose from $1.9 billion (2 percent of total imports) in 2004 to $6.9 billion (3.9 percent of the total) in 2010.\(^{202}\) Overall, Iran also became Turkey’s fifth largest trading partner; trade rose from about $1.05 billion in 2000 to $16 billion in 2011.\(^{203}\) And in 2010, the two governments pledged to further expand trade to $30 billion.\(^{204}\)

Turkey and Iran also expanded the scope of their economic relationship.\(^{205}\) While Turkey’s exports to Iran were lower than its imports from Iran, Turkey began to offer tourism services to Iranians interested in vacationing in Turkey. In contrast to the previous decade where diplomatic visits focused on security problems, in the 2000s Turkey and Iran signed on to a variety of different economic agreements through diplomatic visits. For example, in 2003 a

\(^{200}\) Habibi, Nader, "Turkey and Iran: Growing Economic Relations Despite Western Sanctions," p3.
\(^{201}\) Ibid., p4.
\(^{202}\) Ibid., p4.
\(^{204}\) Ibid., p170.
\(^{205}\) Habibi, Nader. "Turkey and Iran: Growing Economic Relations Despite Western Sanctions,” pgs4-5.
consortium of Turkish firms signed on to a $193 million construction project for an International airport in central Iran. Furthermore, in 2007, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed to transfer 30 billion cubic meters of Iranian and Turkmen natural gas to Europe via Turkey. The Turkish Petroleum Corporation received a license for exploration and development in three sections of the South Pars gas field. In 2008, a Consortium of four Turkish firms purchased the Razi Petrochemical Company. The following year, Iran and Turkey sign a MoU for cooperation in air, land, and sea transportation. In addition, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey signed an agreement to link their electric power grids; and Iran and Turkey signed an agreement giving each other access to their telecommunication network. Lastly, in early 2011, Iran’s largest automaker, Irankhodro, and the Turkish firm Hema Endustri signed a $200 million agreement to jointly produce a car in Turkey. These are only a few of the significant economic interactions between the two, pointing to the expanding and diversifying economic ties between the two countries.

Turkey’s minimal adherence to US sanctions was the most striking aspect of Turkey’s foreign policy towards Iran, pointing to a potential disregard of its long-term security interests. For Iran, Turkey was a valuable partner in alleviating its international isolation. By deepening economic ties with Turkey, Iran sought to discourage Turkey from supporting the sanctions. Although sanctions were effective in reducing Turkey’s exports to Iran, especially in 2008, other modes of economic interaction increased as a result. The closing up of other markets to Iranian businessmen, as in Dubai, led to a surge in Iranian investment to Turkey. Overall, Turkey welcomed these investments. This surge can best be seen through the numbers; in 2002, 319

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\begin{tabular}{l}
\cite{206} Ibid., p5 \\
\cite{207} Ibid., p5 \\
\cite{208} Ibid., p5 \\
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Iranians firms were operating in Turkey, by the end of 2010, this number rose to 1470, and to 2072 in 2011\textsuperscript{209}.

Turkey also served as a smuggling route for goods that Iran could not attain through normal channels.\textsuperscript{210} Border relations improved significantly, as both countries actively promoted closer economic relations between border provinces. For example, in 2009 Iran eased its customs regulations in East Azerbaijan province for trade with the Van province in Turkey; and in 2010, a third border crossing was opened and the countries agreed to establish a joint industrial zone in Iran, 25 miles from the Turkish border.\textsuperscript{211} There was also a great number of Turks going to Iran for business. In addition, the Azeri province of Iran attracted a large number of Turkish firms at this period both because of the lower costs of production, but also due to the lack of a significant language barrier with the Turkish speaking population. Only between 2009 and 2010, 17 Turkish business missions visited Iran. All of these factors point to the blossoming economic relations between the two countries.

Nevertheless, Turkey’s willingness to ignore US concerns, and permit the deterioration of its relations with Israel in this period signaled an overconfidence fed by a lack of reaction from the US. Turkey in this period believed that it was in fact an indispensable US ally, and that the US would simply tolerate its economic rapprochement with Iran. On the surface, Turkey’s assumption held. Turkey did not face significant backlash from the US on this matter. While there was not a significant event that tested Turkey’s contradictory commitment to its security alliance with the US and its economic dependence on Iran, Turkey’s disregard towards the US’s wishes, especially as Iran’s nuclear development became a significant concern for the US, shows the preference of short-term economic interests over long-term security interests.

\textsuperscript{209} Ibid, p5
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., pgs5-6
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., p7
Security Interests

There were three dimensions to Turkey’s security interests vis-à-vis Iran in this decade. The first was the PKK question, which was resolved as a result of Iran’s commitment to actively combat the PKK. The second was Turkey’s growing fallout with Israel, which brought Iran and Turkey closer. The third dimension was Iran’s nuclear development. Turkey’s failure to oppose this on the ground that it poses an immediate security threat serves as a potential challenge to Desch’s hierarchy. Turkey’s foreign policy in this period was not security focused. In fact, in effort to ward off additional sanctions on Iran, Turkey paired with Brazil to work out a deal to transport uranium from Iran to Turkey. Turkey was clearly motivated by economic interests, as their economic interdependence meant that more sanctions on Iran would in turn affect Turkey. Nevertheless, it is worth examining why Turkey did – and continues to – not view Iran’s nuclear build-up as a pressing security threat. This situation may be indicative of a scenario in which short-term economic interests trump long-term security interests.

Turkey’s immediate security concern vis-à-vis Iran diminished for several reasons. Turkey captured Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the PKK in 1999, which weakened the PKK’s armed resistance. Turkey also initiated development projects in southeastern Turkey, the PKK’s stronghold, in order to offset recruitment.212 Although Turkey launched a five-thousand-troop incursion into northern Iraq in 2000, this ended as it became apparent that Turkey had established its influence in northern Iraq. The opposing Kurdish groups in northern Iraq were effectively constraining the PKK. Turkey had already established friendly relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), bringing its geopolitical security perimeter 200-250 southward along the Iraq-Iran border.213 Furthermore, the US occupation of Iraq diminished

213 Ibid., p111.
northern Iraq as a space where Ankara and Tehran could scramble for geopolitical space.\textsuperscript{214} The US occupation moved to exclude Iran entirely from the region of northern Iraq.\textsuperscript{215} This effectively eliminated a significant ground for potential security conflicts between Turkey and Iran.

A series of regional events also contributed to diminishing the PKK problem between Turkey and Iran. In 2001, as it was dealing with its own Moscow/Baku problems, Iran was confronted with Kurdish unrest. Iran therefore sought to keep Kurdish nationalism under control within its own territory. In addition, Turkey and Iran found it necessary, given the war in Afghanistan to assure that no major incidents involving the PKK or MEK occurred along their border.\textsuperscript{216} In October of the same year at the 8\textsuperscript{th} joint meeting of the Turkey-Iran Commission of Security Cooperation, officials on both sides promised to fight terrorism by all conceivable means.\textsuperscript{217} At the meeting, Iran also verbally conceded that the Turkish Hezbollah movement was a terrorist organization. Iran also promised that it would no longer support the PKK, at least in launching attacks against turkey from its territory.

Turkey and Iran’s security interests became further aligned in 2004 with the formation of the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) in Iran. The PJAK, considered to be an offshoot of PKK, declared Ocalan as its leader. As such, Iran’s Kurdish problem became tied to the PKK. After the PKK returned to using violence following a five-year unilateral ceasefire in May 2004, Turkey and Iran’s security ties were tested. The PJAK and the PKK were internal threats for both Iran and Turkey, and their connection necessitated security cooperation all the more.\textsuperscript{218}

\textsuperscript{214} \textit{Northern Iraq had been a useful space for the two countries to carry out their proxy struggles}
\textsuperscript{215} \textit{The first five months of 2003 with regards to Iran’s space in northern Iraq, was therefore more severe than Turkey’s.}
\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., p148
\textsuperscript{217} Elik, Suleyman. \textit{Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011: Conceptualising the Dynamics of Politics, Religion, and Security in Middle-power State}, p91
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., pgs84,87
Immediately after the breaking of the ceasefire, the Iranian deputy minister of interior, Asqar Ahmadi, met with Turkish military and intelligence officers to discuss possible joint actions against the PKK and PJAK in Ankara.\(^{219}\) And in 2004, after a MoU was signed, Iran declared the PKK to be a terrorist organization and delivered twenty-two PKK militants to Turkey. As the PJAK increased its attacks, in February 2006, Turkey and Iran signed a MoU to conduct joint operations against the PJAK-PKK. Turkey and Iran cooperated during Turkey’s first attack in December 2007 targeting PKK outposts in northern Iraq. As Turkish Special Forces crossed the border to attack PKK camps in Zap valley in February, Iranian artillery fired on PJAK outposts in the Kandil Mountains- 2 km from the Turkish border, some parts of the mountain fall into Iran.\(^{220}\) This episode shows how Turkey’s foreign policy in this decade was imbued with a cooperative attitude towards Iran. Far from being threatened by it, Turkey’s immediate security interests converged with that of Iran’s. Both regarded the other as a partner.

At the onset of the decade, Iran worried greatly about Turkey’s strengthening security ties with Israel. As Israel’s determination to be a major player in the security of the Persian Gulf became apparent in its military pact with Turkey between 2000 and 2002, Iran understood the flipside of not stabilizing security relations with Turkey. Israel’s military and intelligence capabilities in Turkey and intelligence presence Azerbaijan, made it clear that Iran was becoming a target of the Turkey-Israel axis. For example, Israel’s defense minister, during a visit to Turkey in 2001, announced the permanent stationing of twelve percent of Israel’s air bombers and fighting aircraft in Turkey.\(^{221}\) The joint “Anatolian eagle” exercises by Israel, the US, and

\(^{219}\) Ibid., p87
\(^{220}\) Ibid., p87
\(^{221}\) Olson, Robert W. Turkey-Iran Relations, 1979-2004: Revolution, Ideology, War, Coups, and Geopolitics., p112
Turkey near the city of Konya (Turkey) also had an Iran focus. These factors seemed to pit Turkey’s security interests against Iran.

When the AKP came to power, however, the Turkish Israel strategic relationship faced rupture shortly after, and Turkey brought itself closer to Iran. Israel’s support of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq was a major issue of contention due to its connection with the PKK. Turkey’s relations with Iran strengthened after connections between Washington-Tel Aviv and the PKK-PJAK were revealed.

The PKK/PJAK threat became more obvious when the PJAK shot down an Iranian military helicopter conducting forward bombing operations in August. As such, the 12th meeting of the Iran-Turkey high security commission was the first senior level gathering in the security field, in which joint military operations were discussed. Turkey’s top General Ilker Basbug commented, “Iran and Turkey have been conducting coordinated simultaneous operations on their respective borders- we are sharing intelligence, talking and making plans with Iran.”

Turkey, far from being threatened by Iran, began to cooperate with Iran at unprecedented levels (since the Iranian revolution). In a sense, Turkey achieved its greater foreign policy goal in the 1990s, to get Iran to cooperate against the PKK; it even exceeded by establishing a partnership.

Due to changing regional circumstances having to do with the PKK, Israel, and northern Iraq, Turkey’s security interests were no longer opposed to that of Iran. The fact that security relations aligned, just as did ideological and economic interests makes it is impossible to

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222 Ibid., p111
223 Elik, Suleyman. Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011: Conceptualising the Dynamics of Politics, Religion, and Security in Middle-power State, p91
224 Ibid., p91
225 Ibid., p92
decipher a hierarchy among these interests. Nevertheless, Turkey’s foreign policy towards Iran in the light of international affairs brings to fore an interesting dilemma in the security front.

Independent from the NATO command, Turkey maintained the Aegan army with a small-scale operation capability; all three of Turkey’s other armies were either under NATO’s command or part of its defense program.226 Turkey not only relied on NATO assets for its military capabilities but was also within the US’s nuclear umbrella. These factors structurally embedded Turkey in the Euro-Atlantic security system. A robust army, membership in NATO, and “a willingness to take security seriously served effectively as Turkey’s primary form of deterrence.”227

Nevertheless, in this period, Turkey’s foreign policy towards Iran seemed to ignore the obligations of being a NATO ally. Willingness to take security concerns as seriously as prior Turkish governments was also absent.228 This was evident in two dimensions of Turkey’s foreign policy: first was its position to ignore sanctions on Iran and support Iran’s nuclear program; second, its continued building of economic interdependence with Iran, in disregard of international concerns for Iran’s acquisition of WMDs, and the prospect of a western confrontation with Iran.

Along with Brazil, Turkey in 2008 brokered a deal to move uranium in Iran to Turkey for enrichment.229 All the while, leaders in Turkey stated support of Iran’s desire to acquire WMDs. They labeled western opposition hypocrisy, pointing to Israel’s possession of such weaponry. Neither statesmen nor the populace at large viewed Iran as representing an existential threat to Turkey; underlying this perception was the fact that Iran and Turkey have not engaged in warfare

226 Ibid., p78
228 The military’s decreasing role in politics was one major cause of this.
for centuries because neither can decisively defeat the other. Nevertheless, Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons did have the potential to alter this balance between Turkey and Iran. Yet, Turkey’s self confidence in this period resulted in a willingness to act as an intermediary between the West and Tehran on the nuclear file. The AKP did not officially welcome Iran’s acquisition of WMDs and dismissed this as an unlikely prospect in the near future. According to the AKP, Iran was far from acquiring/developing such weapons, and western intelligence was faulty, just as it was in the case of Saddam Hussein. Along this line, in June 2010 Turkey’s ambassador to the UN voted against the fourth round Security Council resolution on Iran.

The AKP’s actions and statements in support of Iran’s nuclear program emanated from opposition to Israel’s possession of nuclear weapons. Turkey saw western opposition to Iran’s acquisition of weapons as a double standard, and strictly opposed a US or Israeli strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities. For example, in 2006, Turkish foreign minister, and later President, Abdullah Gul, in an annual party meeting argued that, “if Iranian nuclear weapons are dangerous, then so are the Israeli ones.” Furthermore, in 2008 during a visit to Washington, Prime Minister Erdogan was asked about the Iranian nuclear effort, to which he responded, “those who counsel Iran not to acquire nuclear weapons, should themselves not have these weapons in the first place.” Nevertheless, Turkey did not have any independent capabilities to collect or analyze intelligence with regard to the intentions of Iran’s nuclear problem.

The advent of an Iran with nuclear weapons would have meant three choices for Turkey, according to Henri J. Barkey: furthering multilateral defense through increased NATO

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230 Davutoğlu, Ahmet. Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu, p425
231 Barkey, Henri J. "Unblocking the Road to Zero: Turkey’s Perspectives on Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament., p75
232 Ibid., p70
233 Sinha, Shreeya, and Susan C. Beachy. "Timeline on Iran’s Nuclear Program."
234 Barkey, Henri J. "Unblocking the Road to Zero: Turkey's Perspectives on Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament., p71
235 Ibid., p71
investment, development of own nuclear weapons, and conducting a region-wide diplomatic attack. The only realistic option was the “current multilateral effort under UN auspices aimed at convincing Iran not to proceed with nuclearization to succeed.” Turkey’s actions in this period however directly contradicted what would be necessary for a multilateral defense option. This route would require the strengthening of diplomatic ties with the west, which were loosening by the end of the decade as ties with both Iran and Syria were growing.

Although the Turkish military and security establishment were skeptical about Iran and its intentions during this period, their concerns were not afforded a place in Turkey’s foreign policy. The Turkish General Staff still perceived Iran as an ideological enemy seeking to undermine Turkey’s secular establishment and the region’s Sunni inclinations. In Washington, the deputy chief of staff for the Turkish Armed Forces (later the chief General), Ilker Basbug, stated that Turkey was “following Iran.’s nuclear activities with apprehension.”236 During the same visit, former chief of staff, General Hilmi Ozkok, warned that “unless the crisis over nuclear weapons is not resolved diplomatically, [Turkey] would soon be faced with important strategic choices. Otherwise, we would be faced with the possibility of losing our strategic superiority in the region.”237 While the nationalist camp within Turkey shared the same apprehensions, especially due to Iran’s increasing influence in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, their voices went unheard in the foreign policy sphere, which was dominated by the ruling party. The military at this period was opposed to any sort of attack against Iran by the US or Israel due to its potential impact on the status quo and regional stability.238 So, while they supported the western led diplomatic process, they were, nevertheless, also aware that the failure of the diplomatic initiative will make an Iran with nuclear weapons a very real and strategically

236 Ibid., p72
237 Ibid., p72
238 Ibid., p72
crippling prospect. The AKP did not consider this prospect. The decision to further economic interdependence, despite conflicting long-term security interests, shows an instance in which security interests were driven by an altered threat perception and possibly ignored. Whether this directly challenges the hierarchy is unclear because maintaining cordial ties with Iran was essential in containing Turkey’s PKK problem. The tension between immediate and long-term security interests therefore makes it impossible to determine whether security interests were indefinitely ignored.

Concluding Remarks

This period in Turkey’s foreign policy vis-à-vis Iran shows that when ideological, economic, and security interests converge, relations making it difficult to test Desch’s hierarchy, at least in the short term.

During the 2000s, Turkey and Iran built bilateral security ties to an unprecedented level, due to the solidification of Iran’s own Kurdish insurgency problem. However, by continuing friendly political relations with Iran despite criticism from the US, Turkey situated itself in the middle of two conflicting sides. That could have had serious repercussions in the long term.

The key to Turkey’s shift away from a focus on long term security concerns and alliances lies within the political structure of Turkey. With the diminishing role of the military in politics within this decade, foreign policy was wholly reliant on party politics. As are all parties, the AKP within this decade was often motivated by electoral victory, and was thereby inflicted by a shortsightedness of policy. AKP’s populist vision necessitated the improvement of economic conditions. The AKP considered Iran’s nuclearization to be a long-term prospect, and improving

\[^{239}\text{Ibid., p72}\]
Turkey’s economic standing was a more immediate interest. Although long-term security risks were real, they were trumped by shorter-term economic imperatives.

This decade therefore shows that political parties, which are limited by electoral terms, care more about short-term security interests that can provide enough stability to afford political success for the time being. Institutions - the military in Turkey’s case - vested in the state and its continuation, care more about security interests, whether on the long or short term. So in a sense, it is the when the system affords these institutions a greater place in policy making that the hierarchy of interest holds.

As stated in the International Crisis Group’s 2010 report on Turkey, “it remains unclear what Ankara’s engagement with Tehran benefits most: the cause of global stability, Turkey’s image as a regional actor or the agenda of the Iranian regime.” It was clear however that a nuclear capable Iran was against Turkey’s long-term interests both as a regional player and a NATO ally. Without significant contestation from the military, interest in energy imports from Iran downplayed security interests vis-à-vis Iran’s nuclear program. However, this factor is insufficient in showing a clear challenge to the hierarchy. As the aforementioned long-term security interest was in tension with short-term security interests, which required that Turkey cooperate with Iran to target the PKK. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that this period also does not show a clear adherence to the notion that security interests drive foreign policy.

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240 International Crisis Group, *Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints*, p18
Conclusion

The examination of the ideological, economic, and security interests within three decades in Turkey’s foreign policy towards Iran does not show a consistent support for Desch’s hierarchy.

The first period has within it several instances when the hierarchy holds, and none in which it does not hold. In the first part of the decade, Turkey ignored its ideological odds with Iran in order to pursue closer economic ties. In this way it prioritized economic interests over ideological ones. Later in the decade, when security interests put Turkey and Iran at odds, economic ties were sacrificed. This upholds Desch’s view that security interests trump economic interests.

The second period, the 1990s, for the most part adheres to the Desch hierarchy. In all but one instance, a severe conflict of interest on the level of security (regarding the PKK) prevented Turkey and Iran from pursuing their common economic interests. The one exception came in between 1996 and 1997 with the election of Erbakan. Erbakan’s indifference towards the military’s concerns regarding Iran’s support of the PKK and his prioritization of building links with the rest of the Islamic world constituted an instance in which security interests were overlooked for the sake of economic and ideological interests. Erbakan not only clearly expressed an ideological attraction to Iran but also pursued closer ties with Iran through a natural gas and pipeline deal.

In the third period, in the 2000s, the convergence of interests on all three levels of interests makes it difficult to test the existence of the Desch hierarchy. The resolution of the immediate PKK security problem resulted in a working partnership between the two countries and allowed Turkey to advance into greater economic interdependence with Iran. Nevertheless,
an examination of Turkey’s position vis-à-vis Iran’s nuclear program seems to indicate an instance where security interests do not drive Turkey’s foreign policy.

The stabilization of the PKK security problems between Iran and Turkey demonstrate the presence of AKP’s security incentives. However, Iran’s antimony vis-à-vis the west, especially in light of nuclear ambitions, was counter to Turkey’s long-term geostrategic interest. As such, Turkey’s efforts to help Iran establish a nuclear deal with the west was driven more by economic incentives, as opposed to security interests. Although the hierarchy is not clearly challenged due to significant cooperation between Iran and Turkey regarding the PKK, there was enough tension between economic and security interests (Iran’s nuclear program) to assume that the hierarchy was not solid. Turkey’s support of Iran’s nuclear buildup as well as its position against sanctions, despite long-standing ties to and dependence on the Atlantic security alliance, suggests an occasion in which economic/ideological interests trump, not immediate, but long term security interests.

It is important to stress that, in contrast to the Erbakan period, Turkey under the AKP showed some concern for security interests by focusing on the stabilization of partnerships with other neighboring countries to contain the PKK problem. This partial adherence to the hierarchy points to a clash between Turkey’s regional security interests and its commitment to the international security system. One necessitated close partnership with Iran for the advancement of regional security and domestic economic welfare. The other implied that Turkey should distance itself from establishing unbreakable bonds with Iran.

The complicated nature of this dilemma is likely the reason that the US did not take a hardline approach to Turkey’s growing economic partnership with Iran. The AKP regarded uninterrupted trade with its neighbors as a natural right. So any effort to prevent Turkey from
pursuing economic interests with its neighbors would be perceived as an infringement of Turkey’s sovereignty. And any international demand for Turkey to lessen its economic ties to Iran ran the risk of being ignored by Turkey or overridden by other measures—as proved to be the case with sanctions in the latter part of the decade.

It is safe to say that the two instances in which the hierarchy was challenged suggest an ideological dimension to the foreign policy pursued by Erbakan and Erdogan respectively. Both the welfare party and the AKP sought to redefine Turkey’s outlook towards the world. Both therefore attempted to challenge the status-quo approach by leading an economic rapprochement with Muslim countries. They attempted to challenge the major, previous tenets of foreign policy. In these two cases, the security focus championed by the military was defied in place of a more neo-liberal economic and Islamist approach. Erbakan was ideologically and economically motivated to strengthen relations with Iran, despite continuing tensions regarding Iran’s alleged support of the PKK. Similarly, the AKP government also had both ideological, and economic incentives to further relations with Iran. It is unclear whether ideological similarities were highlighted to further economic interests or whether economic interests were pursued due to a convergence in ideological interests. It is clear however, that security interests, or at least long term security interests, did not drive Turkey’s foreign policy during the WP and AKP tenures.

The important role of ideological interests in the shaping of Erbakan and Erdogan’s foreign policies imply that ideational inclinations are highly significant in Turkey’s relations with Iran. In both cases both leaders made it clear that they did not see Iran as a security threat. But for the military, this threat was continual. Iran’s religious mission was in conflict with the principles of secularism as laid out by Ataturk. Furthermore, the military saw Iran as jockeying for the dominant power position in the region. The military therefore favored a security alliance
with the west. Erbakan and Erdogan however sought to eradicate “western bias” from its security understanding.

The fact that ideological disposition for both the party leaders and the military had a direct bearing on how security interests would be defined shows that interests are perceptually driven. Different actors read events differently due to their ideological inclinations and thus ideology has direct bearing on how interests were perceived and pursued.

The mid 1990s and the 2000s were also periods in which the political party in power was able to contain the influence of the military establishment. When the military wielded significant influence in politics, long-term security was the dominant consideration in shaping state policy towards Iran. The military has been, throughout the Turkish Republic’s history, not only the bastion of Turkey’s secularism but also the force behind the security focus of Turkey’s foreign policy. When the military was ignored or challenged, so were the strategic and security interests driving the foreign policy. In this way, the dynamics of politics within the state shape its foreign policy priorities. This need to disaggregate the state and not see it as unitary actor is an important lesson that the Turkish case suggests for the hierarchy.

Furthermore, Erbakan in 1996 challenged the military establishment with a foreign policy that completely ignored security calculations vis-à-vis Iran. The military despised Erbakan not simply because he advocated an Islamist vision for Turkey, but also because his policies conflicted with their security agenda. The military was convinced that Iran was aiding the PKK and that any sort of economic rapprochement would eventually hurt Turkish security. Because Erbakan did not/ could not prevent the military from intervening in politics, the hierarchy of interests (which prioritized security) was restored relatively quickly through a “post-modern
coup d’etat.” The military brought down the Welfare party government in 1997 and imposed a nationalist leader in Erbakan’s place. The military then resumed its wariness of Iran by accusing it of aiding the PKK and warning it not to do so.

However, during the 2000s, Erdogan slowly contracted the political role of the military establishment. He also instituted a military leadership loyal to him. In this way, the AKP was able to pursue a foreign policy that sought to fulfill its ideological and economic interests, even if this came with the de-emphasis of security concerns. Erdogan and his cabinet effectively controlled the foreign policy making process and were able to implement their policies with near autonomy. By contrast during the 1980s and 1990s when the military dominated the political scene and was largely immune to popular or political recall, Turkey prioritizes security interests in its foreign policies towards Iran. This suggests that states led by institutions that are not reliant on electoral victory have a more realist and long-term approach to foreign policy and that puts it more in line with Desch’s hierarchy.

In addition, examining this period of Turkish foreign policy vis-à-vis Iran has shown that the degree of importance afforded to the different levels of interests relies greatly on the ideological predisposition of the governing party or institution. These dispositions shape the perception of interests being pursued in foreign policy. For example, in the 1990s, the military saw ideological interests as security interests. Iran’s role in strengthening Islamist groups within Turkey was essentially an ideological issue. However, because the military regarded it as a security interest it was treated as such. In the mid 1990s, Erbakan’s disregard of the widely accepted security dilemma regarding Iran’s support of the PKK was ignored because Erbakan trusted Iran’s professions of innocence. Likewise, in the 2000s, Erdogan did not view relations
with Iran to be a power struggle or the advent of a nuclear Iran to be an imminent possibility. Again and again, ideological predisposition shaped the leaders’ perception of interest.

My initial hypothesis that Turkish foreign policy between 1980 and 2010 would adhere to Desch’s hierarchy was challenged by two major cases. The cases of Erbakan and Erdogan have shown that even in the face of a potential security threat, states may prioritize an economically oriented or ideologically driven foreign policy. However it is not clear to what extent the Erbakan or Erdogan governments ignored security interests—or simply had a different perception of security.

The examination of the Turkish case shows that the disaggregation of the state in dynamic and democratic political systems creates a wedge for economic and ideological interests to prevail over security interests. In the case of Turkey, when the military wielded influence over politics, the state was a unitary actor. This allowed the hierarchy to prevail without opposition. However, states are often not unitary actors. Each time democracy began to flourish, and political Islamists assumed power, ideological and economic interests seemed to define Turkey’s foreign policy towards Iran. Furthermore, the security interests under these democratically elected governments were also not defined in the same manner the military had. Neither Islamist party viewed Iran in the same vein as the military. Erbakan trusted Iran despite the military being adamant that Iran was supporting the PKK. Likewise, the military during the AKP government clearly expressed concerns that a nuclear capable Iran would significantly alter the regional balance of power at the expense of Turkey’s geostrategic interests. However, leaders in the AKP struck down such prospect, choosing to point to “western hypocrisy” during discussions of Iran’s nuclear program. This study therefore suggests that for the hierarchy to hold consistently, the
interests of the state need to be clearly defined. As such, the state needs to be in unison regarding its interests.

Testing whether or not a hierarchy of interests drove Turkey’s foreign policy towards Iran after the Iranian revolution has revealed that the hierarchy is not fixed at all times. It depends on the character of the state and whether particular state institutions (e.g. the military) can predominate or whether they must be attentive to the views of political parties and the people. The fact that the hierarchy was valid in periods in which the military institution was able to dominate political parties is indicative of the greater stability which institutions with long vesting power bring to foreign policy making. This study has also confirmed the understanding that security interests are often based on perception. Such perceptive manipulation can allow governments to pursue a foreign policy based upon economic or ideological interests.
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