



# Clash of Interest Over Northern Iraq Drives Turkish-Israeli Alliance to a Crossroads

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*Turkey and Israel enjoyed an almost perfect relationship throughout the 1990s that amazed their friends, yet bothered their rivals. The US war in Iraq revealed, however, that the two longstanding allies did indeed have contradictory objectives and concerns with respect to the future restructuring of Iraq. While Turkey fears the emergence of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq, the same possibility seems favorable for Israel from its security standpoint, vis-à-vis threats posed by countries like Iran, Pakistan, and beyond. It appears that the “amazing alliance” is heading toward a crossroads. Such an eventuality may change the nature of the relationship from a “win-win” to a “lose-lose” situation unless proper steps are rapidly taken with a view toward rebuilding confidence on both sides.*

The military campaign of the United States against Saddam Husayn in Iraq has caused much damage on both sides, in terms of casualties and devastation. The death toll in the streets of Iraqi cities and towns rises daily. Many incidents that would be labeled as, at least, “tragic” a few years ago now turn out to be ordinary data entries for daily statistics. An assessment of the US Central Intelligence Agency outlined three possibilities for Iraq through the end of 2005 “with the worst case being developments that could lead to civil war.”<sup>1</sup> Contrary to some relatively optimistic scenarios that have been discussed in the immediate aftermath of the general elections

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1. See Douglas Jehl, “US Intelligence Shows Pessimism On Iraq’s Future,” *The New York Times*, September 16, 2004, pp. A1 & A6.

MIDDLE EAST JOURNAL ★ VOLUME 59, NO. 2, SPRING 2005

held on January 30, 2005, the future of Iraq is still uncertain in many respects. America's war has also caused much uncertainty about the future of some of the long established relationships among the states in the region. In this context, the deeply rooted Turkish-Israeli relationship<sup>2</sup> also shows signs of being a victim of "collateral damage" from the war in Iraq.

In the aftermath of the toppling of Saddam Husayn's regime in April 2003, it became apparent that Israel and Turkey might indeed have conflicting objectives and concerns with regard to the future restructuring of Iraq. When the United States set on to achieve its political goal of establishing a democratic regime in Iraq, the political climate between Turkey and Israel began to worsen. The US effort required the holding of free elections in Iraq to form a representative body, as the first step towards democratization.<sup>3</sup> These elections affected the sensitive fabric of Iraqi society as the various groups making up the complex demographic structure of the country each began to make claims which could hardly be universally met. Among these is the conflict between those seeking a secular state, who see it as essential to a modern society, and the effort by Shi'i clerics to see that the legal system conforms to the shari'a. Meanwhile the Kurds, who constitute perhaps 20% of the population, insisted on a veto over any proposed constitution which did not satisfy their demands for autonomy. Others criticized this as anti-democratic because a minority was in effect holding the majority hostage.

Turkey has always been uneasy about the aspirations of Iraqi Kurds; any prospect of Iraq coming apart and the emergence of an independent Kurdish entity in northern Iraq produces wariness among Turkish statesmen and the military alike. While Turkey, once Israel's strategic ally,<sup>4</sup> is searching for ways to prevent the creation of a Kurdish state out of Iraqi territory, Israel may be more than happy to see a powerful autonomous Kurdish authority or an independent state in northern Iraq. Since, speculative though it may be, a Kurdish entity with which Israel could conclude, *inter alia*, a comprehensive military cooperation agreement might be highly beneficial for Israel's security. For reasons that will be elaborated later in this article, such an agreement might enable Israel to build a forward defense capability against potential and active threats emanating from countries such as Iran, Pakistan and beyond, in the medium to long-term.<sup>5</sup>

2. See for instance George Gruen, "Dynamic Prospects in Turkish-Israeli Relations," *Israel Affairs* (Summer 1995), Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 44. Also see Daniel Pipes, "A New Axis: The Emerging Turkish-Israeli Entente," *The National Interest* (Winter 1997/98), p. 35.

3. After long speculation about whether the elections could be carried out at all, Iraqi citizens from all segments of society went to the ballot boxes on January 30, 2005. As of the date of publication the new National Assembly was still in the process of forming a government; although turnout had been high in Shi'i and Kurdish areas, the Sunni Arab population had largely avoided voting.

4. See, for instance, Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Turkey and Israel Strategize" *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2002), Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 61-65; Also available at [www.meforum.org/article/128](http://www.meforum.org/article/128).

5. The argument here is not to suggest that Israel is definitely drawing plans to create a Kurdish political entity all by itself.

Therefore, it is quite understandable why Israeli authorities in particular, and the Jewish community in the United States, give support, or at least do not oppose (as much as the Turks would like to see) the efforts of the Kurdish groups lobbying both in Iraq and elsewhere to achieve their grandiose objective, namely the creation of an independent Kurdistan. Moreover, the moral affinity between the histories of the Jews and the Kurds, in which the former managed to achieve their own state only after long and painstaking deliberations, needs to be kept in mind here.<sup>6</sup> There are approximately 160,000 Jewish Kurds (or Kurdish Jews) who are citizens of Israel, most of whom, or whose ancestors, emigrated from Iraq decades ago. Some of these Kurdish Jews are buying land and other intangibles and investing in northern Iraq. One should, therefore, acknowledge the facts and the reasons behind the moral support, if nothing else, given to the Kurds by Israelis and by Jews in general.<sup>7</sup> However, even this kind of moral support may itself further the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations in the years to come.<sup>8</sup>

Against this background, this article aims to give an account of how Turkey and Israel are approaching a crossroads in their strategic relations because of their apparently conflicting views and attitudes about the future political and constitutional restructuring of Iraq.<sup>9</sup> The policies followed by Turkish policy-makers during the pre-war period vis-à-vis US policies toward Iraq are said to be primarily responsible for such an outcome.<sup>10</sup> It was argued that, had Turkey managed to play properly its crucial role in America's wartime strategy, it would have had the upper hand in the shaping of the future of Iraq in lieu of the Kurds, who constitute the majority of the

6. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 called for the partition of the British-ruled Palestine Mandate into a Jewish state and an Arab state. It was approved on November 29, 1947 with 33 votes in favor, 13 against, 10 abstentions and one absent. See the *Resolution Adopted on the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question* (www.un.org). The Resolution was accepted by the Jews in Palestine, yet rejected by the Arabs in Palestine and the Arab states. Israel proclaimed independence on 14 May 1948. On this account, see Joseph Heller, *The Birth of Israel 1945 - 1949: Ben Gurion and his Critics*, University Press of Florida, Tampa, 2000. Also see John Bright, *A History of Israel*, Third Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981). For a different perspective see Gerald Butt, *The Arabs: Myth and Reality*, (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001), pp. 85-149.

7. Interview with Hagit Ben Yaakov, Israeli Embassy in Ankara, October 2002.

8. Turkey, whose population is predominantly Muslim, was one of the first countries to recognize the state of Israel in 1949 and to establish diplomatic relations since then. See Faruk Sonmezoglu *Türk Dis Politikasinin Analizi [Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy]*, (Istanbul: Der Yayinlari, 1998).

9. Strangely enough, Turkey and Israel used to amaze the political and security elite on both sides until very recently with the degree of their strategic cooperation, especially in the security field. For a view from Turkey, see Cevik Bir and Martin Sherman, "Formula for Stability: Turkey Plus Israel," *Middle East Quarterly* (Fall 2002), Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 23-32. For an Israeli perspective, see Ilan Berman, "Israel, India and Turkey: Triple Entente?," *Middle East Quarterly* (Fall 2002), Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 33-40.

10. A look at the Turkish media in the wake of the vote in the Turkish Parliament on March 1, 2003, and especially after the fall of Saddam Husayn and the reported atrocities of Kurdish militia that followed in northern Iraqi cities inhabited by Turkomans, will provide a host of articles and commentaries harshly criticizing the policy pursued by the Turkish government.

population in the northern sectors of that country. As such, it would not now have to be at odds with Israel concerning post-Saddam Iraq. It is, therefore, worth looking into a series of events that took place in the Turkish political and military realms in the months and weeks leading up to the war in Iraq. It is equally worth analyzing, in this respect, how and why these events caused Turkish-American relations to suffer serious setbacks. Therefore, the second section of this article aims to shed light to the background of negotiations between Turkey and the United States, which resulted in a failure to secure the approval of the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

Deterioration of Turkey's relations with the United States did have an equally, if not more, negative impact on its relations with Israel. In such a political atmosphere, the influence of the Jewish lobby, which is very active on Capitol Hill, and of the Jewish-Americans who occupy important posts in the US Administration, on the policies of the United States toward Iraq in general, and toward the Kurdish groups in particular, became a subject of intense political as well as public discourse in Turkey. Israel was generally portrayed in Turkey as being the essential actor drawing the plans for the future of Iraq behind the scenes, and asking the US Administration to execute them.<sup>11</sup> Although an argument along the lines of "Israel has a vested interest in shaping the future of Iraq," was frequently mentioned in such discourses, no substantiating arguments were properly put forward. Thus, the third section of this article is an attempt to investigate, to the extent possible, the concerns as well as the would-be objectives of Israeli policy-makers with regard to the future of Iraq, and to put forward arguments that may explain why Israel may have a potential interest in northern Iraq.

In the international arena, states rarely and only occasionally declare and/or publish their true intentions (e.g., white papers). Yet, it is possible to estimate the probable intentions and actions of states. One way is to make a proper assessment of their threat perceptions, and to determine the most effective ways to counter them, since every state will seek to take effective measures with respect to the threats they perceive. The third section of this article attempts to analyze how and why an autonomous or independent Kurdish political entity in northern Iraq might be extremely crucial for the ultimate security of Israel, a country which perceives itself as encircled by enemies and exposed to existential threats.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, having discussed Turkey's concerns with the emergence of an independent

11. See for example Hikmet Erdogdu, *Buyuk Israil Stratejisi*, [Grand Israeli Strategy] (Istanbul: IQ Kultur Sanat Yayinlari, 2005). Also see, Prof. Dr. Cemal Anadol, *Israil ve Siyonizm Kiskacinda Turkiye [Israel and Turkey Knotted with Zionism]* (Second Edition), (Istanbul: Bilen Karınca, 2004).

12. A number of articles published on this matter and the interviews conducted over the last few years with various people at key positions in diplomatic, political and military spheres in Israel and in the United States, some of whom wish to remain anonymous, assisted in understanding how Israel's security could be enhanced if cooperative relations with a Kurdish entity in northern Iraq could be established over time. Those who expressed views on how important such a cooperative scheme would be from the Israeli standpoint did not necessarily want to undermine the importance of the relations with Turkey. However, it was emphasized that compatibility of these two relationships would be difficult to achieve.



Kurdish state in Iraq, and having assessed the potential role that such a state might play in the security of Israel in the future, the concluding section of the article comments on the degree of possible damage that can be caused to the future of the relations between Turkey and Israel due to their apparently clashing interests over northern Iraq.

### *POLITICAL CLIMATE IN TURKEY PRIOR TO THE WAR*

Basing tens of thousands of American troops on Turkey's soil was thought to be a key part of US contingency planning in the war against Iraq. Representatives of the two countries conducted a series of negotiations to this effect.<sup>13</sup> In the meantime the three-party coalition in Turkey, led by Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, went to early elections and was then replaced by the single-party government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which won two-thirds of the 550 seats in the Turkish Grand National Assembly.<sup>14</sup> The new Turkish government resumed the negotiations from the point where they were stalled, and decided to draft a resolution that would allow American Special Forces to be deployed in Turkey in order to cross the border into Iraqi territory, as part of a plan to encircle the Iraqi forces along with the US and British troops deployed in the south to march toward Baghdad.<sup>15</sup> But, the resolution, which was tabled before the Turkish Grand National Assembly on March 1, 2003, failed, as the total number of "no" votes together with the abstentions exceeded the number of "yes" votes.<sup>16</sup> This development upset the pre-war strategies of the Pentagon and caused fractures in the relations of the two longstanding allies.<sup>17</sup>

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13. Turkey's importance in the US war plans were underscored during a meeting of a Turkish delegation headed by the then Undersecretary of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Ugur Ziyal, with their American counterparts. For details of this meeting see Fikret Bila, *Sivil Darbe Girişimi ve Ankara'da Irak Savasları* [*Civilian Coup Attempt and the Iraq Wars in Ankara*], (Ankara: Umit Yayincilik, 2003), p.171.

14. The three-party coalition consisted of the Democratic Left Party (DSP) chaired by the then Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) chaired by Devlet Bahçeli, then Deputy Prime Minister, and the Motherland Party (ANAP) chaired by Mesut Yılmaz, who did not take part in the government. As a result of the worsening of the economic situation in Turkey following two severe financial crises, the coalition partner MHP called for early elections to be held in November 2002. Many political analysts considered this to be a suicidal decision for the coalition, which ultimately led to its replacement by the newly established AKP chaired by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was sworn in as a deputy first, and then Prime Minister a few months later due to some legal technicalities that had to be overcome through by-elections in February 2003.

15. The difficulties that were encountered during the negotiations were sometimes reflected to media. See David A. Sanger and Dexter Filkins, "US is Pessimistic Turks Will Accept the Deal on Iraq," *The New York Times*, February 20, 2003, pp. A1 & A13.

16. The resolution was not approved with 264 votes in favor to 251 votes against and with 19 abstentions. See Dexter Filkins, "Turkish Deputies Refuse to Accept American Troops," *The New York Times*, March 2, 2003, pp. A1 & A13.

17. Deterioration of the relations was reflected in public statements made by high-ranking officials on both sides. For the words of Robert Pearson, then US Ambassador to Ankara see agency news compiled by TDN staff "Defeat Presented with Sugar Coating," *Turkish Daily News*, March 3, 2003, pp. A1 & A14.



Misunderstanding and miscalculations by the two countries had created profound tensions that were then thought to be highly likely to endure.<sup>18</sup> The failure to implement this pre-war strategy forced the American Administration to resort to an alternative plan,<sup>19</sup> which heavily relied on the militia-like units (*peshmergas*) of the Kurdish forces in northern Iraq, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Mas'ud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) of Jalal Talabani.<sup>20</sup> In the absence of Turkey's active contribution to the US military campaign against Saddam Husayn, the war produced disappointing results for Turkey in two ways. First, Turkey's relations with its staunch ally for decades, the United States, suffered serious ruptures.<sup>21</sup> Second, the outcome that was most unwanted by Turkey (i.e., reliance on the Kurdish groups concentrated in the north in the political restructuring of Iraq over the other ethnic/religious groups that are spread all over the country) strengthened the Kurds.<sup>22</sup> Hence, decision-makers, civilian and military bureaucrats, and intellectuals in Turkey sought to assess what had gone wrong and how to reverse the undesirable developments which the US alternative reliance on the Kurds had produced, as well as to repair Turkish-US relations.<sup>23</sup>

There has been much speculation about why Turkey was reluctant to allow US troops to use Turkish soil. Some argued that Turkey wanted more, and thus resorted to Middle Eastern bargaining techniques with a view to capitalizing on the country's estate value.<sup>24</sup> Some went even further to claim that Turkey had hidden desires concerning the oil-rich Mosul and Kirkuk provinces in northern Iraq, which were governed by the Turks for centuries until the First World War, then lost to the British.<sup>25</sup> Hence, it was alleged that Turkey was conducting secret negotiations with the United States to that effect.<sup>26</sup> None of these claimed motives was remotely close to the truth.

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18. See Frank Buruni, "US Ties to Turkey May Face Enduring Strain, Officials Say," *The New York Times*, March 24, 2003, p. B13.

19. The US Administration kept its hopes alive for a while but then set out to put an alternative plan into operation. See agency news compiled by TDN staff "US Still Hopeful Turkey Will Allow Troop Deployment," *Turkish Daily News*, March 4, 2003 pp. A1 & A14. Also see Steven Weisman, "Powell Says US Can Wage War On Iraq Without Turks," *The New York Times*, March 5, 2003, p. A11.

20. See David Rohde, "If War Hits, Kurds See Way To Grab Old Lands," *The New York Times*, March 14, 2003, p. A13.

21. The term "staunch ally" was used by the US President George Bush, the father, with regard to Turkey for the first time back in 1990. See George Bush, "Address to the Nation Announcing the Deployment of United States Armed Forces to Saudi Arabia, August 8, 1990", *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States 1990*, Vol. 1, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991, pp. 1107 - 1109.

22. See William Safire, "The Kurdish Ghost," *The New York Times*, March 3, 2003, p. A23.

23. See Dexter Filkins, "Turkey needs week or more to reconsider US request," *The New York Times*, March 4, 2003, p. A10.

24. See Eric Schmitt and Dexter Filkins, "Turkey Demands \$32 Billion US Aid Package If It Is To Take Part in a War On Iraq," *The New York Times*, February 19, 2003, p. A15.

25. See Mete Belovacikli, "Clash of Intentions," *Turkish Daily News*, February 28, 2003, p. 14.

26. See Dexter Filkins and C. J. Chivers, "US In Talks On Allowing Turkey To Occupy A Kurdish Area In Iraq," *The New York Times*, March 7, 2003, pp. A1 & A12.



With respect to the bargaining issue, it suffices to say that money discussions with foreigners was traditionally unpopular among Turkish politicians, especially in times of crisis or war. Representatives of a traditional warrior culture would be ashamed if they traded the security of their people for money, regardless of the amount of cash at stake or the level of economic hardship in the country.<sup>27</sup>

The claims of a secret deal with the US to annex Mosul and Kirkuk to Turkey were also unfounded. It is true that the Mosul province of the Ottoman Empire, which covered the entire territory that is now known as northern Iraq including Kirkuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyya, was included in the National Oath that was declared by the First Turkish Parliament in 1920 during the War of Liberation led by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) against the occupying powers.<sup>28</sup> Following the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 as a result of the Lausanne Treaty, Turkey conducted intense negotiations with Britain, then the world's superpower, until 1925,<sup>29</sup> but it failed to convince the League of Nations that the Mosul province should belong to Turkey.<sup>30</sup> Since then, no matter how difficult it may have been for many Turks to acknowledge such a decision, it is a fact of life and has been fully honored by Turkey, so long as all the other parties also honored their commitments, and provided no ethnic and/or religious group sought to claim sovereignty. Turkey even restrained itself despite reports of some actions by the Kurdish *peshmergas* following the fall of the Saddam regime, which could have provided an incentive if Turkey really was seeking to annex Mosul and Kirkuk. But since such an irresponsible act would have further complicated the already tense relations of the parties concerned, Turkey acted with restraint.<sup>31</sup>

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27. Interview with Ambassador Yasar Yakis, then Turkish Foreign Minister, March 2003, Bilkent University, Ankara. Foreign Minister Yakis presided over the Turkish delegation during the early phase of the negotiations with their American counterparts in January and February 2003.

28. See Stanford J. Shaw, *From Empire to Republic: The Turkish War of National Liberation, 1918 - 1923*, (Ankara: Turk Tarih Kurumu, 2001). For a comprehensive study on the making of modern Turkey see Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, (London and New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Limited, 2001) (New Revised Edition).

29. Daniel Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.)

30. The Mosul problem was one of the unresolved issues at the Lausanne negotiations which resulted in a Treaty on July 24, 1923 that paved the way to the foundation of the modern Republic of Turkey on October 29, 1923. During the negotiations, it was agreed to form a commission under the auspices of the League of Nations in 1924 with a view to finding a compromising solution between the British and the Turks who had divergent views on the status of the Mosul province. Turks claimed that Mosul was inherently a Turkish city while the British maintained, on the contrary, that the demographic structure of the region did not substantiate Turkey's claims. Finally, after long deliberations, the Council of the League of Nations decided in 1926 to rely on the commission's report that literally was completely in line with the position of the British in this debate. See David Fromkin, *A Peace to End all Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of Modern Middle East*, (New York: Avon Books, 1989).

31. See Frank Buruni, "Turkey Denies Reports That Its Troops Defied US And Entered Iraq," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2003, p. B7.

*TURKISH CONCERNS ABOUT DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHERN IRAQ*

If these were not the reasons for Turkish rejection of the US forces, what were? Since its foundation, the Republic of Turkey has faced internal as well as external challenges. Leaving aside the external challenges, two major internal threats have always been at the top of the security agenda of Turkish policy-makers, be they civilian or military. The first is religious fundamentalism, which is strongly believed to aim at reconstituting the shari‘a in the country or bringing back the Caliphate, both of which were abolished by Atatürk.<sup>32</sup> The second is ethnic separatism by the Kurdish population living mostly in the southeastern districts of the country.<sup>33</sup>

The war in Iraq could very well have triggered internal conflict in Turkey in either or both of these areas. There were mass demonstrations countrywide,<sup>34</sup> particularly around the mosques, against government policies that supported Turkey’s standing with the United States, whose President had once mentioned a “Crusade” after the events of September 11, 2001.<sup>35</sup> The constituents of the single-party government formed by the AKP are mostly active practitioners of Islam.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, it was no surprise that the government encountered serious difficulty in convincing its deputies to vote in favor of the troop basing resolution.<sup>37</sup> And this indeed happened.

On the other hand, at the beginning of the crisis in the fall of 2002, the military adopted the utmost caution in its stance vis-à-vis the issue of US troop deployment in Turkey, so as not to make any statement that could ignite mass reactions against the

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32. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (“father of all Turks”), the founder and the first President of the Republic of Turkey, abolished the Sultanate in 1922 just prior to the commencement of the Lausanne peace negotiations in Switzerland after the War of Liberation was fought and won against the occupying powers. The reason for the abolishment was to have only one Turkish delegation representing the interests of the Turkish people. However, the organizers of the Lausanne negotiations, the British in particular, had invited both the Ottoman Sultan as well as the representatives of victorious warriors led by Mustafa Kemal. The Caliphate was also abolished soon after the declaration of the Republic of Turkey, which was created as a secular state by its Constitution.

33. A comprehensive assessment of the threats perceived by the Turkish military and the government can be found in the white papers that are occasionally published. See for instance, *Beyaz Kitap [White Paper]* (Ankara: Ministry of Defense, 2000).

34. See Hasan Altinisik, “First Islamist Protest Against AK Party,” *Turkish Daily News*, March 1, 2003, pp. A1 & A14; Also see agency news compiled by TDN staff “Turkish people say no to war,” *Turkish Daily News*, January 22, 2003, pp. A1 & A14.

35. George W. Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” September 20, 2001. For the original script of President Bush’s address see [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

36. The AKP is widely viewed a continuation of the former Islamic parties, with slight variations and cosmetic changes, namely the Welfare (*Refah*) Party and the Virtue (*Fazilet*) Party. The Refah Party was banned with a decision of the Turkish Constitutional Court on February 15, 1998. Its successor, the Fazilet Party faced the same problem and it was banned with a decision of the Court taken on June 22, 2001.

37. Turkish deputies wore white ribbons at a Parliamentary session to signal their opposition to a US-led war on Iraq. See Dexter Filkins, “Turkish Parliament Asked to Approve US Troops,” *The New York Times*, February 26, 2003, p. A10.





security forces in the country.<sup>38</sup> The Armed Forces adopted a cold-blooded approach and a relatively low-profile attitude in order to preserve its credibility in Turkish society as an institution that has long been seen as the “guarantor” of the secular and republican regime in the country, and the “weapon of last resort” against the so-called fundamentalists who desired to take revenge on the followers of Atatürk’s revolutionary principles.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to concerns over religious extremist groups, territorial integrity and internal stability of the country were no less important to the military. Having fought against the insurgencies of the Kurdish separatist organization, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), for more than a decade until the mid-1990s, and having suffered thousands of casualties in these fights, the Army was seriously concerned with the possibility of the proclamation of a Kurdish state in the northern districts of neighboring Iraqi territory. Even short of full sovereignty in the foreseeable future, any form of autonomy that would be gained by the well organized US-backed Kurdish groups in Iraq, was feared as possibly paving the way to full sovereignty in the medium to long term, that could also be followed by certain claims on Turkey, such as for territory and compensation.<sup>40</sup>

#### NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE AMERICANS

Thus, the military was indeed willing to take part in the coalition formed by the US in order to secure a seat for Turkey around the table that would shape post-war Iraq.<sup>41</sup> Yet, due attention was paid so as not to be seen as “warmongers” within Turkish society for the reasons cited above. Hence, military experts conducted painstaking negotiations with their American counterparts, which resulted on February 8, 2003 in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that documented in more than a hundred pages the “rules of engagement” that the parties would observe with regard to the

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38. The Turkish Armed Forces followed the developments rather closely since the beginning, and delegated their frustration with some of the issues to their American counterparts. See “ABD’ye Irak için bes uyari verdik” [“We Gave Five Notes to the US for Iraq”] *Hürriyet*, October 29, 2002. For a statement of General Hilmi Ozkok, the Chief of Turkish General Staff, see the agency news compiled by TDN staff “Ozkok: US Troops And Equipment Are Part Of First Bill,” *Turkish Daily News*, February 22, 2003, pp. A1 & A14.

39. Ad hoc conversations with military officials in the Turkish General Staff and elsewhere who wished to remain anonymous.

40. Turkey was concerned with the possibility of proclamation of independence by the Kurds in Iraq with the close support of the US. See Dexter Filkins, “Turkey Assesses Question of Kurds,” *The New York Times*, February 21, 2003, p. A14. Also see Mensur Akgun, “Kuzey Irak’ta hassas dengeler,” [“Sensitive Balance in Northern Iraq”], *Hürriyet*, March 8, 2003.

41. See Dexter Filkins, “Turkish Military Back Role In US Drive On Iraq,” *The New York Times*, March 6, 2003, p. A11. Also see the agency news compiled by TDN staff “Army Supports Government on US Troops, Warns Kurds,” *Turkish Daily News*, March 6, 2003, pp. A1 & A14.



respective positions of their troops to be stationed in the Iraqi territory.<sup>42</sup> The MOU could not be put in practice because of the disapproval of the resolution on March 1, 2003.<sup>43</sup> A serious implication of the absence of a set of rules of engagement between Turkey and the US was seen on July 4, 2003 when American soldiers detained a group of Turkish Special Forces who were operating in northern Iraq.<sup>44</sup>

The presence of some 1,500 Turkish troops was not at all unknown to the US, ever since they were stationed in northern Iraq in March 1995, when the first large-scale Turkish military operation was conducted in the pursuit of PKK elements into the Iraqi territory.<sup>45</sup> Never had the military presence of Turkey in northern Iraq been a serious issue between Turkey and the US. However, the tide turned with the failure of the troop-basing resolution to get the approval of the Turkish Parliament.<sup>46</sup> The lack of clear-cut engagement rules between the parties was only a time bomb, and it went off on the Fourth of July. Paradoxically, the detention of Turkish soldiers for some 60 hours also provided an opportunity to take a deep breath, to cool down, as well as to reassess the state of affairs between Turkey and the US.<sup>47</sup> There was then a “delicate balance of anger” between the two allies. A fresh start was thought to be possible, and the subject then could be how to help the US out in its dealings with the Iraqi debacle.

#### *EXTENDED NEGOTIATIONS AFTER THE FAILURE OF THE TROOP BASING RESOLUTION*

Due to the possibility of unwanted developments in northern Iraq which could end up with the Kurds having the upper hand in the restructuring of the country, the

42. Turkish and American diplomats had intense negotiations for several weeks. Major issues of contention were the number, as well as the sites, of American troops to be deployed in Turkey and the Turkish troops in northern Iraq. US did not want to jeopardize a potential strategic alliance with the Kurdish groups by allowing Turkish troops into their sectors, while Turkey made the US troop basing resolution conditional upon a similar permit for Turkish troops to cross the Iraqi border. For some details about the document entitled *Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of Turkey and the Government of the United States of America on the Establishment and Implementation of Basic Policy, Principles, Procedures and to Determine the Status of Forces to be Provisionally Deployed in Turkey for the Purposes of Possible Operations Toward Iraq*, see Fikret Bila, *Sivil Darbe Girişimi ve Ankara'da Irak Savasları*, [Civilian Coup Attempt and the Iraq Wars in Ankara], (Ankara: Umit Yayıncılık, 2003), p.225.

43. See Mustafa Kibaroglu, “Turkey Says No,” *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, July/August 2003, Vol. 59, No. 4, pp. 22-25.

44. Dexter Filkins, “Turkey says US has detained some of its soldiers in northern Iraq,” *The New York Times*, July 6, 2003, p. A6. Also see Sedat Ergin “Derhal Özür Dileyin,” [“Make an Apology Right Away”], *Hürriyet*, July 6, 2003, p. 20.

45. See Kemal Kirisci, “Turkey and the Kurdish Safe Haven in Northern Iraq,” *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. XI, No. 3, pp. 21-39.

46. The general mood among the political and academic circles was that, had the resolution not been disapproved, such unwanted developments would not have taken place. See, Fikret Bila, “Ozel Amaci Asan Faaliyetler Yasak!” [“Activities that Go Beyond a Specific Purpose are Forbidden”], *Milliyet*, September 24, 2003, p. 14.

47. See Douglas Jehl and Dexter Filkins, “Turkey Says US Has Agreed To Free 11 Soldiers Suspected In Plot To Kill Kurdish Aide,” *The New York Times*, July 7, 2003, p. A6.



Turkish government, briefed by the General Staff and the Foreign Ministry officials, got involved in further negotiations with the Americans in the autumn of 2003. In these negotiations, the objective was to secure feasible guarantees from the US that the Kurds would not prevail in the politics of post-war Iraq, especially in the north where a significant Turkoman population was living alongside the Kurds.<sup>48</sup> The pace and the tone of negotiations were dramatically different than the previous ones. Until then, an almost constant proportion of the Turkish population was against sending troops to Iraq where atrocities were mounting, including the deadly attacks on the United Nations buildings and its personnel resulting in losses of lives. Eventually, a growing percentage of the population started to acknowledge that the only way to prevent the future damage that would be caused by the chaotic environment in Iraq would be to help the US stabilize the country as quickly as possible, and to secure a promise in return from the US that no Kurdish state would be allowed in northern Iraq in the years ahead.<sup>49</sup>

There were also other serious concerns such as the status of the Turkomans in Iraq and their future constitutional rights. The new Constitution of Iraq is an issue yet to be worked out by experts from inside and outside the country. Turkey is deeply concerned with whether the Constitution will have loopholes or shortcomings in terms of maintaining Iraqi unity. Another major issue of concern to Turkey is the threat of the PKK, which is using Kandil Mountain on the Iraq-Iran border as a sanctuary for its approximately 5,000 members. Turkish and American experts have come together frequently to work out a feasible plan for the elimination of the threat posed by the PKK. Yet, there are a number of difficulties in taking further effective steps right away.<sup>50</sup> But, the Turkish military had made its pledge to send troops to Iraq implicitly conditional upon swift measures to be taken by the US against the PKK elements stationed in northern Iraq. The US did yield to this demand, especially at a time when there were not many countries volunteering to send troops for the stabilization of Iraq

48. Various sources indicate that 97% of the population of Iraq consists of Muslims, of whom some 65% are Shi'i and about 30% Sunnis. Christians constitute 3% of total population. When it comes to ethnic distribution of the population, Arabs constitute 70% of the total population while the Kurds constitute 15-20%. Turkomans and other groups constitute 10% of the population.

49. According to a public opinion poll conducted by the Superonline, a Turkish Internet broadcasting company, between August 26, 2003 and September 26, 2003 some 81% of Turks who answered the polls were against sending Turkish soldiers to Iraq while some 18% of them were supportive of the idea. However, according to a subsequent poll by the same company conducted a month later between September 25 and October 25, 2003 the ratio of those who supported the idea to send troops to Iraq doubled and hit 36%. For the results of the polls refer to the website <http://anket.superonline.com>.

50. First, and foremost, the Turkish Parliament had passed a bill in August 2003 that gave amnesty to PKK members if they gave up their arms and surrendered, provided that they were not involved in killings in the past. The "amnesty law" expired on February 6, 2004. Still a combined military operation against the PKK could potentially create a lot more troubles for the US in the political domain both at home and abroad. Secondly, a military operation against the group in the mountains is estimated to necessitate some 30,000 US troops that would have to be allocated to conduct combat operations for more than a month, which are also likely to suffer hundreds of casualties. The US, however, does not have troops to spare for a prolonged military operation whose political objective and military benefits are not very clear to most Americans.



and maintaining peace and security in the country. Some allies of the US feared heavy casualties while some others were concerned with the legitimacy principle and sought a new UN resolution.<sup>51</sup> Up until mid October-2003, Turkey seemed to have the upper hand in the negotiations with the US with the capability of making a generous contribution in terms of number of troops and the courage to take over the most dangerous zones where the American soldiers were under incessant attacks everyday. At that time, the US Administration seemed to turn a blind eye to the opposition to any Turkish military presence in Iraq that was voiced fiercely among the Kurds as well as the Arab world.<sup>52</sup>

*TURKEY'S PERSISTENT DESIRE TO STEP IN IRAQ: A DILEMMA FOR THE US*

On October 7, 2003, the Turkish Parliament approved the resolution that would allow sending troops into Iraqi territory.<sup>53</sup> Then the US faced a dilemma. Deploying Turkish troops in Iraq would, on the one hand, facilitate controlling the most difficult sectors of the country where US soldiers were being killed or seriously wounded daily. These casualties were an issue in domestic US politics with those who challenged President George W. Bush in the run-up to the presidential elections in November 2004. The Turkish military had gained invaluable experience as well as expertise in prolonged low-intensity warfare in rough conditions during its fight against the PKK and also learned a lot and proved itself in peace-keeping and nation-building efforts in Bosnia, Kosovo and lastly in Afghanistan.<sup>54</sup> Hence, Turkey's offer could not be easily turned down by the American Administration.<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, northern Iraq, which was relatively quieter compared to the rest of the country, could be seriously disturbed with the Turkish flag flying in sectors near the Kurdish-controlled zones.<sup>56</sup> A Turkish troop deployment in Iraq (possibly to the northwest of Baghdad) would necessitate establishing a logistical supply route from Turkey to the deployment area cutting through Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq. Such an eventuality was by no means acceptable to the Kurdish leaders, who

51. Pakistan made it clear that no troops would be sent to Iraq. See the news compiled by the staff "Pakistan Asker Gondermiyor," ["Pakistan Does not Send Troops"] *Milliyet*, September 24, 2003, p. 16.

52. When it became clear for the US that a new UN Security Council resolution could be approved and that it would satisfy the condition of legitimacy for a number of countries, especially in the Muslim world, a series of statements started to emanate from the high levels of the US Administration that sending Turkish troops in Iraq could be risky. The UNSC adopted Resolution 1511 on October 16, 2003 that provided necessary legal ground to send troops to Iraq for restoring security and stability in the country. See Felicity Barringer, "Unanimous Vote By UN's Council Adopts Iraq Plan," *The New York Times*, October 17, 2003, pp. A1 & A12.

53. See William Safire, "Turkey Is Joining Up," *The New York Times*, October 8, 2003, p. A31.

54. For an account of Turkey's contribution to peace operations see "The Contribution of the Turkish Armed Forces to World Peace" on the website [www.byegm.gov.tr](http://www.byegm.gov.tr).

55. See Asli Aydintasbas, "Why America Needs Turkey in Iraq," *The New York Times*, October 10, 2003, p. A31.

56. See Ian Fisher, "Possible Turkish Role Upsets The Iraqi Council," *The New York Times*, October 9, 2003, pp. A1 & A12.



threatened both Turkey and the US with the possibility of armed clashes if Turkish troops entered northern Iraq, which they claimed to be "Iraqi Kurdistan." The Turkish Deputy Chief of General Staff General Ilker Basbug stated quite clearly on October 13, 2003, during a press meeting in response to such threats, that "the Turkish soldiers would retaliate in kind if and when they are attacked no matter by whom."<sup>57</sup> Such statements, one after another, put further strain on the decision then yet to be taken in Washington as to whether Turkish troops should be deployed in Iraq as part of the stabilization force or not. But as a result of the crossfire of words between Turks and the Kurds, the US asked Turkey to stay on its side of the border.

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1511 on October 16, 2003, which legitimized sending military units under the unified command of the US. But many countries were reluctant to send sufficient troops, due to continuing attacks on foreigners in Iraq, regardless of a UN mandate.<sup>58</sup> It is unclear whether at some point the US might again seek Turkish troops in Iraq. Should such a request come from the US, it is hard to predict the stance of the current AKP government and that of the Turkish military. However, Turkish policy-makers certainly want to retain influence in the future restructuring of Iraq to prevent the creation of an independent Kurdish state.<sup>59</sup>

#### *CONCERNS OF ISRAELIS WITH REGARD TO NORTHERN IRAQ*

While Turkish policy-makers and the military are so preoccupied with the contingencies in Iraq and trying to maintain Turkey's marginal capability to control the pace of events, the approach of the Israeli policy-makers to the developments seems to be dramatically different from that of their Turkish allies.<sup>60</sup> As stated earlier, beyond being a moral issue for the Israelis, the geostrategic value of the northern districts of Iraq for the security of Israel is almost unmatched.<sup>61</sup> Patrick Clawson of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy suggests, "Israel's overwhelming national-security concern must be Iran." Given that a presence in Kurdistan would give Israel

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57. See the editorial "Genelkurmay: Saldırlarsa Vururuz," ["General Staff: We will Shoot if they Attack"], *Hürriyet*, October 14, 2003, pp. 1 & 20. Also see İlnur Cevik, "The Spheres Of Interest Of The Military," *Turkish Daily News*, October 14, 2003.

58. During the NATO's Heads of States Summit in Istanbul there was intense discussion on the possible role of the Alliance in restoring the situation in Iraq. However, the outcome is far from being explicit about what exactly NATO countries could do about stabilizing Iraq.

59. See Michael Gunter, "The Consequences of a Failed Iraqi State: An Independent Kurdish State in Northern Iraq?," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* (Spring 2004), Vol. XX, No.3, pp. 1-12.

60. For a comprehensive coverage of Israeli approach see Shai Feldman (ed.), *After the War in Iraq: Defining the New Strategic Balance*, (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2003).

61. For an account of Israel's historic interest in Iraq and the Iraqis see Gawdat Bahgat, "Iraq and Israel," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* (Fall 2003), Vol. XIX, No. 1, pp. 49-78. Also see Seymour M. Hersh, "Israeli Agents Operating In Iraq, Iran And Syria," posted on the website *Democracy Now* ([www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org)), June 22, 2004; On the same subject see Seymour M. Hersh, "As June 30th Approaches Israel Looks To The Kurds," *The New Yorker*, June 28, 2004.



a way to monitor the Iranian nuclear effort, Clawson argues, “it would be negligent for the Israelis not to be there.”<sup>62</sup> Similarly, a former American senior intelligence official argues that the Israelis’ tie to Kurdistan “would be of greater value than their growing alliance with Turkey.”<sup>63</sup> On the same issue, a former Israeli intelligence officer says “we love Turkey but have got to keep the pressure on Iran . . . the Kurds were the last surviving group close to the United States with any say in Iraq. The only question was how to square it with Turkey.”<sup>64</sup>

#### *WMD CAPABILITIES OF IRAN AND PAKISTAN*

The threat of Iranian as well as Pakistani ballistic missiles that could be tipped with weapons of mass destruction, whose ranges can reach any point in the eastern Mediterranean, looms large.<sup>65</sup> It goes without saying that the Iranian clerical regime is deeply hostile to Israel. Bearing in mind the military capabilities displayed by Iran with a series of test-firings of 1,350 kilometer-range *Shahab-3* ballistic missiles since 1998, and the level of their nuclear program (still in dispute but with development of a weapon possible within a few years), Israel has good reason to fear a surprise or even maybe a suicidal nuclear first-strike from Iran.<sup>66</sup> The Israelis believe that Iran wants nuclear weapons to further and bolster its flagging revolution, to provide an alternative to Egyptian secular moderation, and to challenge the military supremacy of Israel and the United States in the Middle East.<sup>67</sup>

Israeli analysts have similar concerns with regard to the Pakistani nuclear weapons and ballistic missile capability.<sup>68</sup> Even though at present Pakistan is believed to be

62. For a detailed account on Israel’s interest in northern Iraq and its intensifying relations with the Kurds of Iraq see Seymour Hersh, *Chain of Command: the Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 2004, pp. 351-360. Also see, Shelomoh Nakdimon, *Irak ve Ortadogu’da Mossad* (Ceviri Ahmet Ekinci), [*Mossad in Iraq and the Middle East* (translated by Ahmet Ekinci)], (Ankara: Elips Kitap, 2004).

63. Hersh, *Chain of Command*.

64. Hersh, *Chain of Command*.

65. Iran is believed to possess chemical weapons and ongoing research programs focusing on the production of biological agents. For further information see Sebnem Udum, “Missile Proliferation in the Middle East: Turkey and Missile Defense,” *Turkish Studies* (Autumn 2003), Vol. 4, No.3, pp. 71-102. Also see Mustafa Kibaroglu “An Assessment of Iran’s Nuclear Program” *The Review of International and Strategic Affairs* (Spring 2002), Vol. 1. No. 3, pp. 33-48.

66. For a detailed study on Iran’s military capabilities see Michael Eisenstadt, *Iranian Military Power: Capabilities and Intentions*, (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1996). Also see Anthony H. Cordesman, “Threats and Non-Threats from Iran” in Jamal S. al-Suwaidi (ed.), *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability*, (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996).

67. According to an Israeli officer, “when the Iranians have enough fuel for enrichment and the technology for it, it’s over.” See Steven Erlanger, “Israeli Spy Satellite Ditches After Takeoff,” *International Herald Tribune*, September 7, 2004, p. 5. Also see David Menashri, *Revolution at a Crossroads: Iran’s Domestic Politics and Regional Ambitions*, (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1997).

68. For detailed information on Pakistan’s nuclear capabilities see Samina Ahmed and David Cortright (eds.), *Pakistan and the Bomb: Public Opinion and Nuclear Option*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998). Also see Devin T. Hagerty, *The Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation: Lessons from South Asia*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998).



preoccupied with the threat posed by the Indian nuclear capability, the war on Afghanistan has shown to the world the degree of “Talibanization of the Pakistani Army,” which has a good deal of nukes at stock. The more the radical Islamic groups seize control of the Pakistani army, the greater will be the threat posed to Israel by that country.<sup>69</sup> Because, a radical Islamic leadership may then turn its face from the east (i.e., India) to the west (i.e., Israel). This is by no means a scenario that can be taken lightly by Israel, a country vulnerable to long range ballistic missile attacks that can be tipped with nuclear warheads, because of the geographical limitations and demographic structure of the country.<sup>70</sup>

#### *IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTIVE STRIKE CAPABILITY FOR ISRAEL AND THE ROLE OF TURKEY*

One must bear in mind that, in case a ballistic missile is fired from Iran toward Israel, regarding the distances involved, which is approximately 1,100 km, and the velocity of the missiles, which is in the order of 2 to 4 km per second in their terminal phases, the total flight time of such a missile would be only a few minutes after launch. Regarding the limitations of even the most sophisticated anti-ballistic missile shields in intercepting all incoming missiles, and the very short duration of flight, it is essential for Israel to be able to prevent such attacks before they occur. This can be done in various ways. The best is through gathering timely intelligence that would enable special units to preempt in order to render the enemy capabilities ineffective.<sup>71</sup> Should intelligence units fail to detect the threat in a timely manner, the next best mode of action from the Israeli perspective would be to destroy the missiles in their most vulnerable positions (i.e., on the launching pad) or in the early phase of the launch (i.e., the boost phase). However, in order to be able to do this, Israeli military units would need to be stationed in areas near the enemy missile launchers and must be able to act very swiftly on very short notice. Whether it uses ground-launched anti-missile weapons or aircraft armed with air-to-surface or air-to-air anti-ballistic missiles, Israel would need to use Turkish air bases and/or the Turkish airspace to combat a launch from neighboring Iran.<sup>72</sup> The military cooperation agreement of 1996 between Turkey and Israel allows such contingencies.<sup>73</sup> One may therefore think that Israel should be satisfied with these guarantees. However, this seems not to be the case, especially after September 11, 2001.

69. See, Mohammed E. Ahrari, *Jihadi Groups, Nuclear Pakistan and the New Great Game*, (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2001).

70. Interview with Ze'ev Schiff, senior journalist and military affairs editor with Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, July 2001, Istanbul.

71. Israel relies on its spy satellite *Ofek-6* to increase surveillance over Iran to be able to have more early warning in case of a surprise attack. See Steven Erlanger, “Israeli Spy Satellite Ditches After Takeoff,” *International Herald Tribune*, September 7, 2004, p. 5.

72. Interviews with Gen. Cevik Bir (Ret.), May 2001 in Ankara and January 2005 in Istanbul. General Cevik Bir is known for being the “mastermind” of the 1996 military agreement between Turkey and Israel during his post as the Second Chief of Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces in the mid 1990s.

73. For more about the Military Education and Cooperation Agreement signed on February 23, 1996 between Turkey and Israel see Tareq Ismael and Mustafa Aydin, *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), p 111. Also see Mustafa Kibaroglu, “Turkey and Israel Strategize” *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2002), Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 61-65.

*ISRAEL'S DOUBTS ABOUT TURKEY'S FUTURE COOPERATION*

The tragic events on September 11 are believed, by some in the non-Muslim world in particular, to have demonstrated the potential of a clash between civilizations, religious motifs being at the forefront.<sup>74</sup> The degree of trauma experienced on that day has unavoidably and deeply affected the mindsets of policy-makers in the Judeo-Christian West. Hence, one must admit that, compared with the political controversies of the past, an age of religious disposition now seems to have opened. Israel, being a Jewish state, and Turkey with its predominantly Muslim population may find themselves further apart, if they do not pay attention to centrifugal forces exerted upon them due to rapidly changing geopolitical realities.

Israel's toughened stance toward the Palestinians, as well as the serial assassinations of top Hamas leaders in the spring of 2004, which were proclaimed as an official Israeli strategy in the war on terror, have created strong reactions in some factions within Turkish society. Large-scale demonstrations were staged, especially following Friday prayers, in the mosques of big cities such as Istanbul and Ankara where Israeli flags were burned. Moreover, a couple of innocent Jewish-Turkish citizens were killed by radical Islamists for no reason other than their mere religious identity. Amid these events, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan added further and unprecedented strain with his bitter statements toward Israel. Erdogan harshly criticized Israeli security units in his public speeches for their "indiscriminate killings in Palestine and not using caution." He went on to blame his Israeli counterpart Ariel Sharon for "retaliating to suicide bombings by committing state terror against innocent Palestinians."<sup>75</sup> In an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Prime Minister Erdogan said "the Israelis are treating the Palestinians similar to the way they themselves were treated 500 years ago." During the interview, Erdogan also said, "Turkey favored a revival of the peace process" and added that "the crisis that had erupted between Israel and Turkey could be overcome if the two sides acted with sincerity towards each other."<sup>76</sup> The Turkish Premier also said that "our ancestors extended a helping hand to the Jews in Spain during the Inquisition. During that period, the Jews were the victims. Today the Palestinians are the victims. The Israelis are bombing civilians from helicopters. They are killing children, women and the elderly and demolishing buildings."<sup>77</sup>

74. See Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No.3. (Summer 1993), pp. 22-28.

75. For a number of such statements made by the Turkish Premier see for instance Zübeyde Yalcin and Evren Mesci "Ve Israil'e sari kart!", ["And Yellow Card to Israel!"], May 26, 2004, *Sabah*, ([www.sabah.com.tr](http://www.sabah.com.tr)).

76. During the course of mounting tension between Turkey and Israel after the war in Iraq because of Israel's alleged role in the developments in the country favoring the Kurdish groups in the north, Ariel Sharon's desire to meet with Tayyip Erdogan, during a stopover in Istanbul on his way back to Israel from an official trip, was refused by his Turkish counterpart due to "scarcity of time" and the "short-notice of the request." Later on, following the events in the Gaza Strip in Palestine, Tayyip Erdogan cancelled his planned trip to Israel claiming, "the political atmosphere in the region was not suitable for such a visit."

77. For details of this interview translated from Israeli daily *Haaretz* see "Israil devlet terroru yapıyor" ["Israel Commits State Terror"], *Hurriyet*, June 5, 2004 ([www.hurriyetim.com.tr](http://www.hurriyetim.com.tr)). On a similar account see Abdullah Karakus, "Israil'in yaptigi terror," ["What Israel Makes is Terror"], April 14, 2004, *Milliyet*, ([www.milliyet.com.tr](http://www.milliyet.com.tr)).





Against this background, it is not difficult to understand the reasons why Israeli decision-makers would not want to depend on Turkey in protecting their country against possible nuclear missile attacks from Iran and beyond. Israeli diplomats and policy-makers are concerned with the question of “who can guarantee that Turkey will allow Israel to use its territory or its airspace, for example in 15 years from today, in case of a missile attack from Iran or beyond is imminent?”<sup>78</sup> The ancestors of the Islamic party in government today were ousted from power in 1997 with a “post-modern” coup initiated by the military.<sup>79</sup> But, today the AKP is in power with a two-thirds majority in the Parliament. Hence, Israeli diplomats and policy-makers are also concerned with “who will come to power in Turkey in 15 years or later,” while they believe that “Tayyip Erdogan will be the next President of Turkey.”<sup>80</sup>

#### *THE ESTATE VALUE OF NORTHERN IRAQ FOR ISRAEL*

A conclusion to be drawn from the above argument is: Israel should be looking for another ally in the region that would serve the very same purpose with fewer unknowns in the future. The best candidate would be the Kurds in northern Iraq, who are not fundamentalist, nor are they likely to have a political system or a bureaucratic mechanism which might create friction vis-à-vis the expectations of the US or Israel, particularly in the military domain.<sup>81</sup> And the Kurds will be indebted to those who will have contributed, in one way or another, to achieving their ultimate objective of creating an independent state.

The estate value of northern Iraq stems from its position along the Iranian frontier. When that territory was under the control of Saddam in the 1980s and early 1990s, Turkey's southeast served a similar purpose of lying along the Syrian, Iraqi as well as the Iranian borders, and thereby sending these capitals the message that their strategic assets were within the reach of Israeli Air Force. Having been liberated from Saddam's rule, northern Iraq itself became accessible to the US and therefore Israel, the latter being a potential ally of the Kurds. It would only be a matter of formality to station forward defense units of Israel such as *Arrow* missiles, as well as the F-16s in northern Iraq in the years to come, if and when Israel decides to enter into contractual relations with the Kurdish entity that is gradually emerging. Then, Israeli analysts and policy makers will not have to worry about the direction of domestic politics and the public sentiment in Turkey as to whether the next government would honor the highly sensitive security and defense arrangements between the two countries in the decades to come.

#### *CONCLUSION*

The developments taking place in northern Iraq have displayed so far the potential of a clash of interests of two key countries in the region, Turkey and Israel. The

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78. Interview with Sharon Bar-Li Sa'ar, Israeli Embassy in Ankara. October 2003.

79. See İlnur Cevik “Ugly Debate Over Erkaya's Demise,” *Turkish Daily News*, July 2, 2000.

80. Interview with Sharon Bar-li Sa'ar, Israeli Embassy in Ankara. October 2003.

81. See Seymour Hersh, *Chain of Command*, pp. 351-360.



possibility of the emergence of Kurdish self-rule, autonomy, or a full-fledged state in the north is probably the worst case scenario for Turkey, with regard to the future of Iraq,<sup>82</sup> whereas the very same development may be seen as an opportunity to strengthen and consolidate the forward defense capability of Israel against the rapidly rising threat of ballistic missiles with nuclear, chemical or biological warheads, which may target Israel, posed by countries like Iran and Pakistan as well as other potential countries in Central Asia where radical Islam is on the rise. If this is the case, Turkey and Israel may find themselves at odds and they may waste lots of opportunities that could be beneficial for both parties.

However, there is no serious reason for Israelis to doubt the commitment of a significant proportion of the Turkish population to the preservation of parliamentary democracy in the country. There is equally no reason to believe that the powerful institutions in Turkey, the military being at the forefront, as well as academia, non-governmental organizations, and various interest groups may ever compromise the secular characteristic of the republican regime. The stance of the Turkish military is particularly important in this respect, because the agreement that was reached between the military establishments of Israel and Turkey back in 1996, and the security guarantees thereof will remain in force as long as both parties desire it. Therefore, Israel's misgivings about Turkey's assurances in dealing with the threats on the horizon are unfounded. Both countries should do their utmost to build confidence between them.

One last point to bear in mind is the following: terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 have shown to the world that in the future non-state actors may stage such attacks that may cause much greater damage than attacks that can be launched by states. There exist effective ways and means to deter an attack by a state with the

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82. Prior to the first democratic elections in Iraq in over half a century, on January 30, 2005, the top officials in Turkey, both civilian and military, including the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Chief of Turkish General Staff issued serious warnings to the effect that the legitimacy and legality of the elections should not be overshadowed by the initiatives of the Kurdish groups in northern Iraq aiming at changing the demographic structure of Kirkuk and Mosul (both of which are heavily populated by the Turkomans) by moving in Kurds from rural areas to cast their votes in these cities with a view to having more Kurds elected to the national and provincial parliaments. Among these statements, the ones made by the Second Chief of Staff Gen. Ilker Basbug during a press meeting on January 25, 2005 were, as expected and as usual, the most straightforward pointing at the possibility of resorting to force, if need be, should the Kurds go so far as to declare Kirkuk to be the capital city of a would-be independent Kurdish state. Iraqi Kurdish leaders Mas'ud Barzani and Jalal Talabani were, as expected and as usual, quick to reply with even more bitter statements touching the nerves of most Turks, asserting that the proclamation of an independent Kurdish state, with Kirkuk as its capital, was only a matter of time, and that Turkey and the Turks had no right to say a word about these "internal matters of the Kurds of Iraq." For details see, for instance, the Internet news portal [www.ntvmsnbc.com](http://www.ntvmsnbc.com). Amid such crossfire, which unnecessarily raised the tension in an already heated political environment, positive signals are also coming from higher-ranking officials in American diplomatic circles suggesting that the US Administration will be "sensitive to the legitimate rights of the Turkomans in Kirkuk and will work to make that city a model of intraethnic harmony for the country and the region." Interview with a high-ranking diplomat from the US Department of State, January 2005, Boston, MA.

possibility of retaliating in kind. However, non-state actors such as *Al-Qa'ida* do not have a specific address to retaliate against, nor do they have any strategic assets to lose. They are ready to sacrifice their lives, and they cannot be paid off with any material gain. Nothing compares to Heaven for those who dearly believe that they will get there after implementing their task (e.g., destroying Israel). No missile shields, no cutting edge military technologies, no forward defense capabilities can effectively deal with the unprecedented threats posed by such actors.

However, sound and timely intelligence can protect nations which are the targets of terrorist organizations. By means of intelligence one can either preempt or prevent, or at least diminish the possible damage that can be caused by such attacks. Intelligence gathering in a geography which has much in common with the Turks', and Turkey's current military and civilian intelligence-gathering capabilities should be extremely valuable to the Israelis, no matter how powerful they have been in this field for decades. Against this background, it remains for both the Turks and the Israelis to look at the greater Middle East from a much wider perspective, by putting aside their short-term concerns and limited objectives. It should be hoped that the official visit of the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gul in late December 2004 might constitute the first step to revitalize the rather long stagnated level of intense and sincere cooperation in the military and political domains between Turkey and Israel. If there is a pair of countries in the region whose relationship can result in a "win-win" situation, these are probably Israel and Turkey.