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SAKARYA UNIVERSITY
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**THE EFFECT OF PKK/PJAK ON TURKISH-IRANIAN
RELATIONS (1979-2015)**

MASTER THESIS

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Department: Middle Eastern Studies

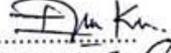
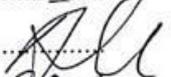
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Approval Page

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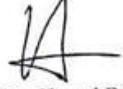
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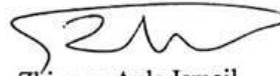
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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis fits the scientific standards of academic research, and that the entire preparation of this thesis is my original work and free from utilization of others' works unless there are similarities of direct quotes and scientific standards of references, which can never be changed. I also declare that this is the first time this thesis is presented as a master's thesis, and it has never been published as another thesis at this university or any other universities.



Zhirwan Aula Ismail

June 29, 2018

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<p>This thesis explains what impacts the terrorist group Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)/PJAK¹ has had on Turkish-Iranian Relations. The duration of this thesis is 1979-2015, but with a brief of historical background showing the situation that brought the PKK into existence. The thesis consists of four main chapters. The first part of the first chapter is focusing on the historical background of political atmosphere in Turkey before the foundation of PKK. Another part of this chapter focuses on the break out of direct fire and the violence that PKK has brought to Turkey since 1984. We have explained here how Iran-PKK relations were, how Turkey was dealing with the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), how the war affected the PKK violence in the region, and how generally Turkish-Iranian relations were going on through all these changes. Chapter two mostly focuses on the situation during the 1990s. That period was the spring of PKK-Iranian relations, so the Turkish-Iranian relations (in terms of security and border controlling) were at the worst level. The third chapter is focusing on the matter in 2000s, especially since the rule of Justice and Development Party (AK Party) in Turkey, which brought the Turkish-Iranian relations into another stage. The regional changes, such as the American Invasion of Iraq in 2003, had escalated the PKK/PJAK violence on the borders and that made both Turkey and Iran reconsider their relations to deescalate violence on the borders. However, the recent changes in the region, such as relations between Turkey and the Kurds in Northern Iraq, the existence/withdrawal of American forces in the area, the Arab Spring, and the Syrian crises have directly affected the Turkish-Iranian cooperation for deescalating the PKK/PJAK violence on their borders. In the last chapter, we have given the Syrian Crisis as an example of these recent changes in the region. Here we have explained what exactly the PKK role in the Syrian crisis is, and to what extent the PKK figure in the Syrian crisis has affected the Turkish-Iranian relations.</p>	
Key Words: PKK, PJAK, Iran, Turkey, Syria, PUK, KDP, Kurds, the USA, Arab Spring, Terror.	

¹ Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê (PJAK): An anti-Iranian PKK offshoot terrorist group fighting against Iran since 2004.

Tezin Başlığı: The Role of PKK/PJAK in Turkish-Iranian Relations.	
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<p>Bu tez, terörist grup Kürdistan İşçi Partisi'nin (PKK) / PJAK'ın Türk-İran ilişkilerini ne yönde etkilediğini açıklamaktadır. Tezin zaman aralığı 1979-2015 yıllarını kapsamaktadır ancak PKK'yı ortaya çıkaran durum tarihsel bir geçmişe sahiptir. Tez dört bölümden oluşmaktadır. Birinci bölümün ilk kısmı, terörist grup PKK'nın kurulmasından önce Türkiye'de varolan siyasi atmosferin tarihsel arka planına odaklanmaktadır. Birinci bölümün ikinci kısmı ise doğrudan yangının patlak vermesini ve PKK'nın 1984'ten bu yana Türkiye'ye getirdiği şiddeti incelemektedir. Bu kısımda İran-PKK ilişkilerinin nasıl olduğu, Türkiye'nin İran-İrak savaşı (1980-1988) ile nasıl başa çıktığı, bölgedeki PKK şiddetini nasıl etkilediğini ve tüm bu değişimlerle Türk-İran ilişkilerinin nasıl devam ettiği açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır. İkinci bölüm daha çok 1990'larda yaşanan duruma odaklanmaktadır. Araştırmaya göre bu dönem PKK-İran ilişkilerinin ilkbaharıydı ve bu nedenle Türk-İran ilişkileri (güvenlik ve sınır denetimi açısından) en kötü dönemdeydi. Üçüncü bölümde, 2000'li yıllarda, özellikle Türk-İran ilişkilerini başka bir aşamaya getiren Türkiye Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin (AKP) bu konuyu nasıl ele aldığı açıklanmaktadır. 2003'te Irak'ın Amerikan İşgali gibi bölgesel değişimler, PKK/PJAK'ın şiddet olaylarını tırmandırılmış ve bunun sonucunda hem Türkiye hem de İran ilişkilerini yeniden gözden geçirmiş ve sınırlardaki şiddeti azaltmışlardır. Ancak, Kuzey Irak'taki Kürtlerle Türkiye arasındaki ilişkiler, bölgedeki Amerikan kuvvetlerinin varlığı/geri çekilmesi, Arap Baharı ve Suriye krizi gibi bölgedeki son değişiklikler, PKK'nın kontrolü için Türk-İran işbirliğini doğrudan etkilemiştir. Son bölümde, Suriye İç Savaşı örneği üzerinden bölgedeki son değişiklikler ve ilişkilerin dinamiği çözümlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Burada Suriye krizinde tam olarak PKK'nın rolünün ne olduğunu ve bu krizde PKK'nın Türk-İran ilişkilerini nasıl etkilediğini açıklanmaktadır.</p>	
Anahtar Kelimeler: PKK, PJAK, İran, Türkiye, Suriye, KYB, KDP, Kürtler, ABD, Arap Baharı, Terror.	

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ABBREVIATIONS

AK Party	: (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi). Justice and development Party
AQI	: Al-Qaeda in Iraq
KDP	: Kurdistan Democratic Party
KDP-I	: Kurdistan Democratic Party-Iran
NC	: National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces
PJAK	: Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê
PKK	: Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê
PUK	: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PYD	: Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat(
SDF	: Syrian Democratic Forces
SNC	: Syrian National Council
USA	: United States of America
YPG	: Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (PYD's military group in Northern Syria)

Introduction

Turkey and Iran as two regional actors have been rivals for centuries going back to the time when each was possessing its own empire (Ottoman² and Persian³ Empires). The rivalry of the two states has been on a number of issues, each state struggling to be the dominant culture over the region. What exactly these two states share is the Kurdish issue. Both states have the same national security threat while there has been less security cooperation between both to reduce the threat than it logically should be. PKK, which is a terrorist group and is “alleged to be socialist and anti-imperialist,”⁴ has been conducting terroristic activities against Turkish state and civilians since 1984. Both Turkish and Iranian governments view PKK as a threat to their respective national security. Due to the violence which PKK has started against the state, approximately more than 40.000 people (military and civilians) have been killed.⁵ Turkey has been seriously in line with Iran for cooperating to control the shared borders between the two states where the PKK has settled down. However, from time to time, the level of cooperation between the two states has faced ups and downs. While there is Turkish-Iranian relations, there is also Iranian-PKK relations that we should consider.

It may sound strange the view that Iranian government has/had ties with a terrorist group that has directly violated Turkey. But the view that Iran has not helped PKK in the past is questionable. Nevertheless, it is safe to argue that both Turkey and Iran think that an independent Kurdish state would threaten their national security. It is equally true to argue PKK, as a terrorist actor, has been manipulated by the Iranian government against Turkey, its main regional rival power. Although Turkey and Iran did not have similar approaches to deescalate the PKK threat, the main regional events which took place in

² The Ottoman Empire used to be the world's largest powerful empire during 15th and 16th centuries lasted for more than 6 centuries. It was officially ended in 1922 replaced by nowadays Turkish Republic.

³ A name given to a number of dynasties came one by one from the 6th century B.C to 12th Century A.D. The Empire used to be the largest empire the world had ever had before.

⁴ Balci, Ali. "The PKK-Kurdistan Workers' Party's Regional Politics: During and After the Cold War." Sakarya University, Sakarya: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. P. 1.

⁵ Strozier, Charles and Frank, James. The PKK: Financial Sources, Social and Political Dimensions. VDM Verlag Dr. Müller. 2011, pp. 45-47

the 1980s and 1990s had forced both countries to develop a common perspective about PKK and even coordinate their policies in this regard. Although Iran did not view PKK in positive terms, the major events of the last three decades in the Middle East demonstrate that Iranian government has not abstained from manipulating PKK against Turkey. During those decades, Turkey has always tried to convince Iran to cooperate with it against PKK but in vain.

This paper covers the impact of PKK factor on Turkish-Iranian relations during the period of 1979-2015. In order to demonstrate this thesis, we provide in the first chapter, a brief historical background about the development of the Kurdish question in Turkey before the emergence of PKK. Then we will cover a survey of major events which had affected the Turkish-Iranian relations during the 1960-1980s. In the last part of this chapter, special attention will be given to the impact of the Islamic revolution in Iran (1979) and Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) on Turkish-Iranian relations and how these events shaped the Iranian and Turkish governments' perspective on PKK. Chapter two focuses on Turkish-Iranian relations during the 1990s. We demonstrate here the extend of PKK-Iranian cooperation. We argue that during these years, security and border cooperation between the two countries were at the worst level. The third chapter is focusing on the era of AK Party that was found in 2001 and is in power in Turkey since 2002. AK Party brought a change in Turkish-Iranian relations in the term of some degree of cooperation on security and border issues between the two countries. In this chapter, especial attention will be given to the impact of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 on the Kurdish question in the Middle East and how it caused the rise of PJAK/PKK violence on Turkish-Iranian borders. We will also address in this chapter the impact of withdrawal of the USA forces from Iraq and the ability of PKK to avail itself of the subsequent developments. In the last chapter, we use the Syrian crisis as another major event in which PKK factor plays a role in rivalry between Iran and Turkey in the Middle East.

Methodology and Research Hypothesis:

In the study, we have pursued a combined qualitative and quantitative methodological approach in analyzing the issue we have covered. In general, we have used qualitative methodological analysis in covering the controversial issues. The quantitative methodology has been utilized only in dealing with the statistics which have been

provided in the literature covered in this thesis. Discourse analysis makes up a good proportion of this study. Specifically, critical discourse analysis is our path in analyzing the issue. We have also addressed the relevant major events, which affected the subject we have covered, in chronological approach.

PKK terrorist group has been militarily and logistically helped by the Iranian government even though the level of this aiding faces ups and downs from time to time. However, the nature of Turkish-Iranian relations dictates that both governments willingly or otherwise had to at the end cooperate with regard to the security challenges that stem from the existence of PKK on their borders.

Research Limitations:

This study, like any other academic works, has faced many challenges and has several limitations. First and for most, the writer did not have a proper access to the relevant archives of neither Turkish Government nor the Iranian Government. In addition, due to the secrecy and complex nature of decision making among PKK, the writer had insurmountable difficulties to have access to the sources of decision making among PKK. The writer thought that holding interviews or formulating a questioner top address the hypothesis which has been mentioned above would have served the goals of this research considerably. This was not visible due to the mentioned complex nature of the matter under investigation.

Significance of the Research:

The subject we have covered in this study has paramount significant for the Turkish national interest. The PKK security issue has been an ongoing challenge in Turkish foreign relations with neighboring countries especially with Iran. The issue has a significant bearing on Turkish regional policy. In this study, we confine ourselves to Turkish-Iranian relations. The study is giving a precise picture of Turkish-Iranian relations and of both states' policies towards the PKK issue in the region. The nature of the security issue is that any political, regime change, and security event that has been happening in the region (especially in Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq), can have direct impact on the PKK issue. That is because the PKK issue is a shared security issue on the

borders, and PKK is using the Kurdish issue (a shared national security issue between these two states) for reaching its goals. Therefore, the writer of this research has tried to chronologically analyze the regional events that have left direct impact on the Turkish-Iranian relations regarding deals with PKK. The importance of this research is that it eventually gives a precise picture of this security issue and its impacts on the bilateral relations between the two states.

Literature Review:

There have been plenty of books, academic studies, and journals written about Turkish-Iranian relations and the PKK issue. *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* of Aliza Marcus (2007) is one of the examples written about PKK issue in the region. Marcus only focuses on PKK using the Kurdish issue for perusing its leftist and violent agenda against the Turkish state. She specifically talks about the PKK fight against Turkish state saying that PKK has been manipulative in using the Kurdish problem against Turkey to give legitimacy to its own existence. But she does not mention the mutual mechanisms between Turkey and Iran for controlling the violence, which is our focus here. Ali Balci's *the PKK-Kurdistan Workers' Party's Regional Politics: During and After the Cold War* (2017) is also another valuable source written about PKK. Balci is using PKK as one of the dissident violent ethnic group to understand how such groups see the world politics. The book is important to understand the PKK's leftist and communist ideology. However, the study does not make reference on the impact of PKK on Turkish-Iranian relations.

Idris U. Eyrica has also written a master's thesis titled as *Roots and Causes that Created the PKK Terrorist Organization* at Naval Postgraduate School (California 2013). Throughout his thesis, Eyrica is focusing on the 1960-1980s Turkish political and security situation and the reasons that caused the emergence of PKK. The thesis provides a vivid and detailed account of the violent acts which PKK had been perusing against the Turkish state. There is also interesting and informative data about important personalities in PKK terrorist organization. Eyrica's thesis has been a valuable source for this study. The paper has been useful for us in two ways: on the one hand, it is academically analyzing the emergence of PKK. On another hand, it is a field work which contains valuable and indispensable data. This is due to the fact that the author was a captain in the Turkish

army and provides valuable first-hand account. The writer has hardly touched upon the impact of PKK on Turkish-Iranian relations though.

Sinkaya Bayram's master thesis, "*Conflict and Cooperation in Turkey-Iran Relations (1989-2001)*" the Middle East Technical University-Turkey (2004), addresses in detail the bilateral relations between the two countries by focusing on ideological and geopolitical factors which had weighed heavily on the bilateral relations between the two countries at different stages. He rarely touches on the impact of PKK as a security issue on the borders between the two states.

There are dozens of other studies have been written about Iran and Turkey relations and most of these address the PKK factor only in passing. A paired research study of Nilufer Karacasulu and Irem Karakir titled as *Iran-Turkey Relations in the 2000s: Pragmatic Rapprochement* (2011) provides valuable insights into the bilateral relation between the two states. Nevertheless, the study is brief and needs a detailed explanation and clarification on several important security issues which can be only understood in the context of border security issues.

Another article written by Zeinab Octab "*Changing Security Perceptions in Turkish-Iranian Relations*", published by SAM, Summer 2004, is a very informative and helpful source in understanding Turkish perspective about the changing patterns in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran during the 1990s. But the article does not cover the Iranian perspective in the matter.

As demonstrated above, there has never been a single manuscript dedicated to the discussion of PKK factor in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran. This study is providing specific details about the direct and indirect impact which PKK has left on the bilateral relations between the two states. In order to better understand the impact of PKK on both states' relations, we explain the subject through analyzing major events which happened in the region, such as the Islamic Revolution of Iran (1979), Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), the American invasion of Iraq (2003), and so on. Each of these major events had influenced the development of PKK's terrorism and its impact on the bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran. Therefore, we hope our thesis to fill the needed gap in the existing literature on Turkish-Iranian bilateral relations.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: BEFORE 1984, THE KURDISH FACTOR IN BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND IRAN:

1.1. The Formation of the Saadabad Pact:

The end of the First World War brought a new stage for the Middle East generally and for Turkey especially. Turkey, the successor of the Ottoman Empire, lost a lot of territory of the empire and built a new nation state in 1923. During the first decade of Turkish new state, the successors of the Ottoman Empire, or we can say the founders of the new republic, were busy within the internal stabilization of the country. The new state was a secular "pro-Western" state even though religion was still a very significant aspect that was used to satisfy the major Muslim population of the country to support the newly established state.⁶ At the end, a secular state was founded, and stabilization took place in Turkey.

Despite of the fact that the young Turks in the new established state were following the ambitions of the state founder (Atatürk) and they were trying to abolish the Ottoman Empire elements, the new state had its own characteristics that the founders had to follow. For example, the majority of the population in the county was Muslim, and it was hard to rapidly satisfy all the population to give up the Ottoman culture and follow the new secular system regulations.⁷ At the same time, the country itself had a very geopolitically strategic location. It is a bridge between the West and the Middle East. And it can be easily affected by the regional political changes. Therefore, even though the new founders of the state were following a totally different system from the Ottoman system, they had to develop their relations with the regional states, which they started to do soon, for example, with Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

Turkish regional relations with the neighbors started to develop step by step. The significant stage of the Turkish foreign relations with the neighbors especially started

⁶ Volk Thomas, "Turkey and the Middle East: A Multilayered Relationship," <https://www.cairn.info/revue-l-europe-en-formation-2013-1-page-11.html>, accessed 13.12.2017.

⁷ Ibid

within the “debates on the ‘neo-Ottoman orientation.’”⁸ Turkish foreign relations with the eastern countries very much developed in 1930s, especially with Iran and Iraq. During 1930s, the political developments and security incidents directly affected the Turkish foreign relations. The threats that the European countries were faced with the “fascist movements” directly made Turkey begin “to collateralize” the Turkish strategic relations with the eastern neighboring countries.⁹ Turkey started to focus on securing its borders and avoid the same threats that the European states were faced. Securing its borders within the Western countries was Turkish first focus. It secured borders with Romania, Greece, and Yugoslavia in 1934 Balkan Pact.¹⁰ After that, Turkey focused on establishing good security relations with its eastern neighbors to safe its Anatolian territory. The Kurdish question was the most significant threat for Turkey, and the Turkish state founder stepped ahead for establishing good diplomatic relations and then to sign security treaties with its eastern neighbors. And for that, especially, Iran, Iraq, and Syria were very important countries with which Turkey had to cooperate because they were also sharing the same threat that Turkey had faced.¹¹ The first step of these diplomatic efforts was a pact that Turkey signed with Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan in 1937, which is known as the Saadabad Pact.¹²

Prior to the Saadabad Pact, mutual efforts between the two states regarding to securing the borders were seen. For example, in 1926, Turkey under Atatürk and Iran under Reza Shah Pahlavi, who were both pro-western leaders, signed a security agreement. The agreement was a "non-aggression pact" through which both countries were able to cooperate and improve both states' bilateral relations.¹³ Despite of the fact that Turkey seemed to be a bit skeptical about Iran in mutual cooperation, later a visit of Reza Shah in 1934 to Turkey and staying in Istanbul removed all these skeptical feelings of the

⁸ Onar F. Nora, "Neo Ottomanism, Historical Legacies and Turkish Foreign Policy," EDAM Discussion Paper Series, (March 2009), p. 7.

⁹ Volk Thomas, P. 12

¹⁰ The Balkan Pact 1934: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Balkan-Entente>, accessed 13.10.2017.

¹¹ Volk Thomas, P. 14

¹² Original text of the Treaty of Saadabad 1937: <http://www.worldlii.org/int/other/LNTSer/1938/163.html>, accessed, 23.1.2018.

¹³ Volk Thomas, P. 9

Turkish President about Iran.¹⁴ After that visit of Reza Shah to Turkey, Turkish and Iranian relations stepped ahead to another stage. Many fields of mutual relations could improve. Among these fields was security cooperation between the two states to secure the borders.

The other two members of the Saadabad Treaty, Iraq and Afghanistan, were also very important regional actors with which Turkey could improve relations. In 1926, borders were officially settled down to Iraq and Turkey gave up the Mosul region. Turkey started to establish diplomatic relations with Iraq. Iraqi officials payed visits to Ankara as well. For example, the Iraqi Foreign Minister payed frequent visits to Ankara, and he could establish good relations with Turkey, especially with Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, Turkish Foreign Minister of the time and even with Atatürk himself. At the same time, Turkey had started to establish good relations with Afghanistan as well. In 1928, when the King of Afghanistan, Amanullah Khan payed a visit to Ankara, he signed the treaty of security and friendship pact with Turkey.¹⁵ From that time, the Afghan military assistance to Turkey and Turkish-Afghan security cooperation started.

The above-mentioned brief background on the establishment of regional diplomatic relations between Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan was a preparation for the first regional security treaty known as the Saadabad Treaty. The treaty was signed in July 8th of 1937 in the Saadabad Palace of Tehran by the Foreign Ministers of the four respective countries. The text of the treaty is ten articles. The heart of the treaty is that all the countries confirm the newly established countries' borders and agree to secure the borders with each other. Mutual security operations when there is a security threat on one member of the treaty was allowed. The Kurdish threat on the borders of Turkey, Iran and Iraq was directly affected by the treaty.¹⁶

From the Saadabad Treaty, Turkish diplomatic relations and security cooperation with the Middle Eastern countries step by step improved. For example, following the Saadabad Pact, a number of other security pacts between Turkey and regional countries

¹⁴ Ibid, P. 10

¹⁵ "Turkey to continue winning Afghan hearts and minds," Arab News, 26 Aug 2017, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1151206/middle-east>, accessed 24.1.2018

¹⁶ Ibid

took place as well. Baghdad Pact in 1955 (which was later known as the CENTO and Iraq pulled out from the pact) and Phantom Pact in 1958 are two examples of Turkish security cooperation with neighbors, including Iran. And we should keep in mind that a very significant part in signing these security cooperation agreements was the Kurdish issue in the region.¹⁷

1.2. Turkish Government's Approach to the Kurdish Issue before the Emergence of PKK:

For more than three decades, the terrorist group (PKK) has been the fore of Turkish national security concern. Since 1984, due to terrorist activities of PKK against the Turkish government, thousands of civilians and security forces inside and outside of Turkey have been killed. Despite of that, since the emergence of PKK, this tension has cost billions of dollars for Turkish military expenditure. This has also destructed the infrastructure of most of Kurdish populated cities in the Southeastern part of Turkey. PKK's tactics have not always been against the Turkish security forces but also against civilians who have been counted by PKK as supporters of the Turkish military or Kurdish civilians being counted as "unfaithful" people in the mind of PKK members.¹⁸ In order to completely understand the nature of the conflict, first we need to know what the PKK is and the roots it has come from are. There are many reasons made the PKK active in its terrorist activities against the Turkish government. Among these many reasons, there are three factors "from which PKK has been able to conduct its activities."¹⁹ The first factor is "the political atmosphere of Turkey in 1970s and 1980s." The second factor is the leadership of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. And the third one is "the foreign ambitions related to PKK."²⁰

¹⁷ Volk Thomas, P. 16.

¹⁸ Eyrica U. Idris. Roots and Causes that Created the PKK Terrorist Organization. Naval Postgraduate school, Monterey, California: Master's Thesis. Sep 2013. P. 17

¹⁹ Bruno, Grek, "Inside the Kurdistan Workers Party PKK," Council of Foreign Relations. 19 October 2007, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/inside-kurdistan-workers-party-pkk>, accessed 20.12.2017.

²⁰ Ibid.

1.2.1. Turkish Coups and Political Instability in Turkey during 1960-1980

During 1960s to 1980s, there were devastating effects on democracy in Turkey because of a number of military coups and the inability of coalition governments to succeed over the coups. Therefore, during these twenty years, Turkey was driven into chaos.²¹ The country's constitution of 1961 was the result of the coup of the same year. Those who succeeded the coup wrote the constitution. Turkey was ever experiencing the most liberal constitution in its history. A constitution that gave different political and ethnic groups of the country the opportunity to mention "rival ideas" that were forbidden to be mentioned before throughout the country.²² Out of the new constitution, by the year of 1971, many radical groups in Turkey managed to polarize the society from which a struggle between right and left wings started in the society of Turkey. These societal struggles opened the door for the coup of 1971. And the 1971 coup "suppressed illegal groups in the country."²³ However, these groups continued to do their activities underground. Regarding to the connection between the coups and the terrorist movements in Turkey, including the emergence of PKK, the Sep 12, 1980 coup brought the space for PKK to go ahead and develop. After that coup, PKK founders were able to step by step increase terrorist activities against the government and the people who were following the government. Therefore, right after the coup, PKK became the most brutal terrorist organization in the society of Turkey.²⁴

At the same time, Turkey was under huge effect of Europe, and students' activities throughout European countries had increased. Inspired by students in Europe, in Turkish students (mostly universities) started demonstrations as well. However, the demand of Turkish students was different from the demands of European students. The students of Europe were fighting against "materialism of post-war reconstruction" while Turkish

²¹ Gunter M. Michael, "Political Instability in Turkey during the 1970s," *Conflict Quarterly: The Journal of Conflict Studies*, (Winter 1989), p. 63.

²² Eyrica U. Idris: "Roots and Causes that Created the PKK Terrorist Organization." NPS. Monterey, California. Sep 2013. P. 20.

²³ Marcus, Aliza. *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*. New York: New York University Press, 2007. P. 73.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 202.

students were asking for "under development of Turkey."²⁵ Since 1950s and under the administration of the Democrat Party, the Turkish economy very rapidly improved. However, that rapid economic development caused economic inflation in the country. And high level of economic inflation rubbed out material gains. Therefore, the government implemented a new policy for controlling the inflation which was to depend on foreign countries' help. Being unsatisfied with the policy of the government to control inflation, university students throughout the country found the solution in "Marxist ideology."²⁶ During the 1960s and 1970s, Turkish economic system was very much dependent on imperialism. Among the foreign aid actors, American aid was the most effective foreign aid in Turkey that made the Turkish economy rely on the American aid. Students found Marxism as a solution for solving the economic situation in the country, and what had pushed students to propagate for Marxist ideology was the liberal constitution of 1961 in Turkey.²⁷

During the time, Abdullah Öcalan was explaining to his comrades the importance of implementation of Marxist ideology for improving the Turkish economic system. "The 'Marxism' of the [Apocus] movement [had] been adopted from the wave of the Marxist Left in the 1960s and 1970s."²⁸ By late 1960s, the demonstrations very much expanded. The expansion of the demonstrations was not only in size but also their influences remarkably increased. Different classes of the society like, students, teachers, trade organizations, teachers' associations, youth organizations, engineers, doctors and even officers from police were demonstrating.²⁹ That was a very big challenge for Workers' Party of Turkey (Türkiye İşçi Partisi TIP). That challenge negatively affected the internal organizational figure of the party, and by 1969 the party was split out for different fractions.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 224.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, PP. 224-225

²⁸ Özcan, A. Nihat. PKK (Kürdistan İşçi Partisi) Tarihi, Ideolojisi, Ve Yöntemi. Ankara: Avrasya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi Yayınları. 1999.

²⁹ Eyrica U. Idris, P. 21.

By the end of 1969, the revolutionary people, especially students, became more radical and demonstrations from peaceful stages changed to violence. The students and other people were using armed struggle against the government.³⁰

Very big number of Kurdish students from Turkey were among the demonstrators, and the success of the demonstrations pushed them ahead to better organize themselves and revolt against the government. A new stage came out that broke the silence of Southeastern Anatolian area between 1937-1960. By late 1969, The East Revolutionary Culture Society (Doğu Devrimci Kültür Ocakları, DDKO) was found. DDKO was using slogans for supporting Kurds in the country. It was mixing the internal issues of the country related to Kurdish people with Marxist-Leninist ideology. By 1970s, the DDKO opened offices in many cities, such as, Ankara, Istanbul, Batman, Kozluk, Diyarbakir and Silvan. Because DDKO was a leftist organization, it was also supported by leftist political parties especially the TIP. The DDKO was identifying the Kurdish problem in Turkey as “there is a Kurdish population in Turkey’s East. Holding the governance, the fascist authority has put Kurdish society to an assimilation and suppression policy and many times this turned to a bloody dominance.”³¹

Öcalan was getting benefited from this organization and was participating in all these activities especially during 1970s. He was using the same word "assimilation" to identify the Kurdish issue in the country. And that became the core of PKK later.³²

Most of the people who were killed out of armed struggles and violence were young students. However, a number of public figures were killed in the country, for example, in 1980, Nihat Erim who became the Prime Minister after establishing the national government, post 1971 military coup. And Abdi İpekci, who was a very famous Turkish editor, was assassinated in 1979. This means that not only students and ordinary people were killed out of the violence and instable situation of Turkey between 1960s and 1970s, but also victims included politicians and educated people as well.³³ Martial Law was

³⁰ Ibid, p. 23

³¹ Demirel, Emin. Geçmişten Günümüze PKK Ve Ayaklanmalar. Istanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat, 2005. P. 72.

³² Ibid, pp. 71-72

³³ Mango, Andrew. Turkey and the War on Terror: For Forty Years We Fought Alone. Routledge: 1st edition. New York. 2005. P. 18

announced by Ecevit in many provinces of Turkey, but security and military forces of the country were not able to re-stabilize the country.

By the middle of 1970s, the violence had increased remarkably. This time they turned to ethnical tensions. For example, it happened to pit Sunni Muslims against Alevi people and Turks against Kurds or vice-versa. The dramatic increase of tensions in the society and the increase of "legal and illegal pro-Marxist organizations," the country was under huge danger of disastrous societal problem. The army leaders had come to the realization that civilians are "meddling" in a dangerous way as the result of democratic and freedom opportunities they had been given within the 1961 constitution.³⁴ Therefore, the army tried to find out a solution for the societal and security problems of the country. And at the beginnings of 1971, the Staff Chief of the army toppled down Demirel's administration. Demirel was following the same ideas and administrative techniques of Menderes. Therefore, he was considered to "be a successor of Menderes' mainstream government."³⁵ After that, the country was fully under control of the army and it was on stage of emergency. The Turkish Workers Party (TIP) was officially banned, and the uprisings were mostly controlled by military. Many activists, politicians, and students were reportedly arrested.³⁶

At the same time, as the result of the emergency stage of the country and army rule, the DDKO was weakened and its power remarkably decreased. So many members of DDKO were arrested, and many of its members, who were able to run away from Turkey, fled to the regional neighboring countries such as, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. Those people who were able to fly from Turkey continued their activities in the neighboring countries. Few years after, elections were held in Turkey and the emergency stage of the country was ended.³⁷ The army left the administration of the country to the elected government. Those members of DDKO who were still active in the neighboring countries, tried to reunite. Even though they tried hard to go back to the country and continue their activities for the

³⁴ Özcan, K. Ali. "Turkey's Kurds: A Theoretical Analyses of the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan." Routledge in Middle East and Islamic Studies. 1st edition. New York: 2005. P. 18

³⁵ Ibid, pp. 30-31

³⁶ Mango, Andrew, p. 18

³⁷ Birand A. Mehmet. Apo Ve PKK. Büyükdere, İstanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1992, pp. 34-36

same aims (struggle for Marxism in Turkey), they were not as effective as they had been before the coup of 1971.³⁸

In 1974, the Democratic Leftist Party (Demokratik Sol Partisi, DSP) took power and Bülent Ecevit became the Prime Minister of Turkey. Ecevit was quite softer than the previous military/governmental officials. "Ecevit convinced the TBMM to enact a general amnesty for the militants who were arrested during the 12 March Coup (1971 Military Coup)."³⁹ What Ecevit was trying to do was quite a political adventure in which he put himself on a huge political danger under which he could not eventually stay safe. He was trying to provide a ground that was far away from violence and instability in Turkey. In another word, he was focusing on keeping balance between the leftists and the rightists so that both together live in peace in Turkey comfortably. However, the results of this policy were not what he was expecting to be. Because of his soft policy, many members of the DDKO who had left the country could freely return and start their activities again inside the country. These people were including Kurdish people who were organizing themselves under different "separatist" motivated groups. So, basically the period between 1974 and 1978, was a very significant opportunity for these groups of people who were still not satisfied with the political system and were trying to make changes under the umbrella of Marxist-Leninist ideology. As Idris Eyrica mentions, between the period of 1974-1978, a lot of leaders who were out of Turkey returned to the country and many were from prisons released out of the soft power policy of PM Ecevit. Those leaders soon started their activities and established "illegal groups" in different areas of Turkey including centers of big cities.⁴⁰

Now that we are in the period of 1974-1978, the seeds of PKK were cultivated to plant the Marxist ideology in Turkey. The period between 1974-1978 was the gap that was the opportunity for Öcalan in which he could develop his ideas for establishing "theories of socialist revolutionary activity" and then founding a terrorist movement on the same road against the state of Turkey.⁴¹

³⁸ Demirel Emir, P. 71

³⁹ Ibid, P. 74

⁴⁰ Eyrica U. Idris, P. 24

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 29-30

As mentioned above, the base of PKK was socialist revolutionary rather than being in the pro-imperialist side.

"The founding manifesto of the PKK, *Kürdistan Devrimi'nin Yolu* (The Path of Kurdistan Revolution), was not just a simple roadmap for achieving the national liberation of Kurdistan as a unified country through a Marxist-Leninist revolution. In the eyes of PKK members and its sympathizers, this founding document had an equal status to Marx and Engels' Communist Manifesto and therefore, thoughts and arguments in it were ahistorical. After a detailed account of the struggle between imperialist countries led by the USA, and socialist countries led by the Soviet Union, *Kürdistan Devrimi'nin Yolu* declared socialist states as natural allies of the Kurdistan revolution"⁴²

What this means is that from the base of PKK's establishment, the main aim was a socialist (rather than nationalist) revolution for the aim of "liberation of Kurdistan" as PKK leaders were arguing.

However, this revolution needed logistic and financial support to be successful. At the same time, PKK was not that much strong to be able to organize such a revolution on the ground because of its inability to finance its activities. According to Nur Bilge Criss, who mentioned in his book, "*The Nature of PKK Terrorism in Turkey*," the PKK members from the first phase of the party chose a very wrong direction by conducting social crimes in the cities for collecting money. Nur says that PKK members for supporting their activities financially were robbing goods from houses and shops in the center of cities and markets.⁴³ This is despite of the fact that PKK was an illegal organization established in Turkey while there were other legally registered organizations worked on Kurdish issue, such as Rizgari, KOIP, and Ala Rizgari.

During the period of 1975-1980, the left-wing and radical terrorist organizations which were using the Kurdish issue, including PKK, were mixing communist ideology within Kurdish nationalism. During that period, these separatist groups were strongly inspired by some events happened internationally, such as the whole political atmosphere of communism at that time, the War of Vietnam, as well as the regional events of the Middle

⁴² Balci Ali, P. 118

⁴³ Criss B. Nur, "The Nature of the PKK Terrorism in Turkey," Taylor and Francis Online: Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Vol. 18, No. 1, (August 1995), pp. 17-37

East, such as the intifada of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Palestine. In the meanwhile, the "weak coalition" cabinets of government in Turkey in 1980s were not able to provide a secured atmosphere for the society of Turkey. And they could not establish social order in terms of security, stability, and economic and public services for the people. Most of the governmental institutions that were in charge for providing public services "split into rival factions" due to the social disorder in the country.⁴⁴ The situation, therefore, pushed the PKK ahead for organizing and strengthening itself in the country. At the same time, the leaders in the government such as Bülent Ecevit and Süleyman Demirel were not able to provide "a common front." As the result, the government was step by step weakened and the separatist groups were step by step strengthening.

The unsecured atmosphere of the country strengthened PKK, and later, violence broke out between the terrorist organization and the state of Turkey. During the period prior to the 1980 coup in the country, too many people lost their lives out of the violence between the two sides. Despite of the fact that PKK had not yet declared fighting against the government, there is huge number of casualties out of the terrorism violence between the government and the terrorist organizations that were spreading out violence directly from the beginnings of 1979 to the end of 1980. The number of people who have been murdered during that period is approximately 3710, out of which 164 people were members of security forces, and the rest were poor civilians of the country. The number of terrorists killed during that period in the country was 146 terrorists. This is despite of that the total of 10417 people were wounded from both sides (the government and the terrorist organizations).⁴⁵

Despite of the fact that the level of security and stability in the country was very weak and political atmosphere not being under control of the government, the communist organizations that were raising the Kurdish issue were not able to cooperate with each other. The level of cooperation between the different groups that were fighting for a Kurdish separate state was very low, and that situation later left negative consequences on their fates.⁴⁶ The PKK was not accepting other organizations to work with, and PKK

⁴⁴ Eyrica U. Idris, P. 25

⁴⁵ Ibid, P. 33

⁴⁶ Demirel Emin, pp. 45-47

leaders of the time believed that the other organizations are cooperating with government to destroy PKK. In other words, PKK was not relying on the other groups out of the circle of PKK ideology.⁴⁷

The situation prior to the coup was much chaotic that even the parliament of Turkey could not elect someone for the presidency of the country, and the country did not have a president until the military coup of September 12, 1980 took place. Besides all the political and economic crisis in the country, the area of Southeastern Anatolia had a very "old fashioned system" which had made other obstacles and difficulties for the government to have the full control over the area. At that time, there was "Aşiret (tribal) composition" system in the area, which means the Şeyhs (tribal religious leaders) were able to use the population very easily. The rest of the population was used and controlled by the Şeyhs, and that was difficult for the government to control the security and solve the economic and social atmosphere of the area without the support of the Şeyhs.⁴⁸ At the same time, because of the geographical surface of the land in the area and the "feudal composition," the Turkish security forces were not able to have the full control access over the area. And this had facilitated the situation for PKK members and leaders to easily move between Turkey and Syria, as during the time the Syrian regime was helping them. As the result, a serious of cabinets of the government failed to control the security issues. And the country military leadership decided to control the situation. So, September 12, 1980 military coup took place and changed the whole situation of the country again.

However, before the coup, the PKK leaders had left the country and were settled down in Bekaa Valley, Syria.⁴⁹ There are two possibilities for their withdrawal from Turkey before the coup. The first one is that it is possible that they had the information that a military coup was going to take place. To save their lives, they left the country prior to the coup. Or, they had already planned to leave the country for finding a safer haven

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Nihat A. Özcan, P. 16

⁴⁹ Criss B. Nur, P. 19

outside of Turkish control for themselves. The coup took place and provided a catastrophic fate for terrorist and illegal organizations throughout the country.

After the coup, the military could take over the country for about four years. During these four years, there were huge numbers of casualties all over the country as the result of the political/military instability. For example, only the number of detained people during these four years was 180,000 people.⁵⁰ During the military rule, the legal/illegal and terrorist organizations were mostly controlled. The PKK power was remarkably decreased as well. The terrorist group continued to work abroad but its members were remarkably decreased inside Turkey. During these four years, Abdullah Öcalan was able to strengthen the organization and introduce himself "as the undisputed leader of the organization."⁵¹

1.3. How Did the Political Instability of 1960-1980 in Turkey Affect Turkish-Iranian Relations?

Despite of the fact that Iran and Turkey were two very important neighbors and both were pro-western countries (Iran until 1979 since the end of the First World War), these two neighbors were the two major Islamic rivalries of the region. The Kurdish issue has been a shared national security issue for both. However, the regional competition between the two countries has made both use the Kurds against each other. Therefore, Kurds have remarkably affected the bilateral relations between the two states. And this has raised especially within the start of PKK emergence. For Turkey, Iran has been very important with which to cooperate for solving the issue. But Iran has sometimes used the issue as a card against Turkey to strengthen itself in the regional competition against Turkey. Even though Iran did not openly aid any Kurdish group in the region until the new Islamic Revolution of 1979 toppled down the Pehlevi Dynasty, the Kurdish issue was erupted especially in the 1970s when Muhemmad Rezah Shah of Iran backed the Kurdish organizations in Turkey.⁵²

⁵⁰ Mango Andrew, P. 18

⁵¹ Eyrice U. Idris, P. 26

⁵² Arkun, Aram. "The Kurdish Question and Turkish-Iranian Relations: From World War I to 1998 by Robert Olson," *Iranian Studies*, Vol 33, No. 1/2 (Winter-Spring, 2000), p. 266.

Regarding to the Kurdish issue, relations had been normalized between Turkey and Iran since 1975. However, the Shah of Iran was not very popular inside the Turkish population because of "his backing to the Kurds" generally. When the Islamic revolution started in Feb 2nd of 1979, the Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit declared that Turkey is not intervening in internal issues of Iran. But the Shah of Iran was not getting support from most of the Turkish population "because of his Kurdish policy."⁵³ Therefore, while the revolution was going on in Iran, a number of Turkish newspapers were criticizing the Shah's regime for using violence against demonstrators, and they were promoting for the success of the revolution.

Within the success of the Islamic revolution and toppling down the Shah of Iran, Turkey condemned the takeover. But at the same time, Turkey did not accept the USA demand of the use of Incerlik base in case if America would try to use military forces against Iranian Islamic regime. And Turkey did not participate in the economic embargo put on Iran by the USA. Even though these events were directly related to the Turkish foreign policy towards Iran and the USA, when dealing with Iran, the Kurdish issue has been among the most important subjects that directed concentration of the Turkish foreign policy.

During the eight years of Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988), Turkey chose to be neutral with both countries. This neutrality of Turkey did not let Iran use the Kurdish case as "a political card" against Turkey, as it did against Iraq. At the same time, this neutrality policy gave a huge economic opportunity to Turkey because Turkey could increase its economic relations with both sides at the same time.

During the Iran-Iraq war, Iran did not want to give big opportunities for the Kurds to establish their own independent state and change the demography of the region. But it was in good connections with the Kurds especially in Northern Iraq and "it was aiding other Kurdish movements who were willing to support Iran."⁵⁴ However, that policy of Iran was seen as a "dangerous game" by Turkey. Turkey was afraid that this support of

⁵³ Carley, Patricia, "Turkey's Role in the Middle East," A Conference Report, United States Institute of Peace, (Jan 1995), P. 12.

⁵⁴ Gundogan, Unal. "Islamist Iran and Turkey, 1979-1989: State Pragmatism and Ideological Influences," Middle East Review of International Affairs, Vol. 7, No. 1 (March 2003), p. 3

Iran would gradually increase the sense of nationalism, and Kurds at the end try for changing the demography of the area. Therefore, Turkey was opposing that policy of Iran and was trying to satisfy Iran not to support the Kurdish movements aiming separatism, especially inside Turkey.⁵⁵ But there is one reality that all should know which is that Iran was not supporting the Kurds for establishing a Kurdish state in the region, but the support of Iran was only for maintaining security cooperation between Iran and "any Kurdish movement" against Iraq so that Iran will at the end win the war.

From 1983, PKK gradually strengthened its relations with Iran. The relations between PKK and Iran especially strengthened when Iraq and Turkey signed an official agreement in 1983, to conduct security operations on land supported by air forces on the borders against Kurdish movements. The focus of Turkey by signing that agreement with Iraq was PKK, which was becoming stronger and stronger on the Iraqi-Turkish borders, especially in Northern Iraq. After signing that agreement with Iraq, Turkey was able to conduct security operations inside the Iraqi territory. And that made Iran diplomatically angry of Turkey because at that time Iran was in fighting against Iraq. That was the main reason that Iran opened the door for PKK members in 1983 and 1984 when most of terrorist members of PKK ran away from the borders of Iraq and Turkey because of Turkish airstrikes in Northern Iraq. Iran welcomed the PKK members to enter Iran's territory and refused the Iraqi-Turkish agreement of security operations against PKK on the borders.⁵⁶ Turkey formally asked Iran to sign a similar agreement like of Iraq-Turkey, but Iran refused the offer and "condemned the Turkish-Iraqi agreement."⁵⁷

While the Turkish government was trying to make Iran understand the Turkish concern, Iran was becoming more and more unsatisfied with the Turkish regional policy in the mid of 1980s. In 1984, Iran sent a "warning" letter to the Turkish government about the ongoing military operations that were taking place on the borders. The Iranian parliament speaker, Rafsanjani, said that Iran is unhappy about the Turkish military movements on the borders, and Turkey as a NATO member should avoid cooperating with the Baa'th

⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 3-4

⁵⁶ Robins, Philip. Turkey and the Middle East. London: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1st edition. 1991. P. 54

⁵⁷ Ibid.

regime in Iraq. He continued saying that Turkey has to deal with Iran for removing the Baa'th regime in the region as it is the base of security problems in the area.

However, during the same year (1984), both countries could reach an agreement for securing their borders. They agreed that both sides would not allow "any terrorist movement" on the borders of the other, and shared security forces would control the borders between the two sides.⁵⁸ It is very much important that we understand that during 1980s, the main concern of Turkey was to secure its borders from terrorist groups, but the main concern of Iran was to defeat the Baa'th regime of Iraq in the eight-years Iran-Iraq war. Therefore, Iran was doing everything for the sake of defeating the Iraqi Baa'th regime, and Turkey was doing everything for securing its borders. Because their interests were different, it was difficult for Turkey to make Iran understand the aim of Turkey in the limited Turkish cooperation with Baa'th regime in the borders.

Despite of the fact that Iran and Turkey signed an agreement of security cooperation on the borders in 1984, Iran concerned about Turkish military operations in Northern Iraq in 1987 again. Iran claimed that Turkey "wants to expand its borders and join Kirkuk and Mosul with the Turkish territory."⁵⁹ Turkey, however, was considering the Iranian-Kurdish alliance as a threat against Turkish national security and internal stability. By 1986, it seemed that Iran was going to win the war against Iraq. And Iran was concerned about the future of Northern Iraq and the Turkish control in that area. At the same time, the Iraqi regime was not strong enough to have full security control over the borders. Both sides, Iran and Turkey, were afraid of each other to increase their hegemony on Iraqi territory. Therefore, each of the two was calling for Iraqi territorial unity and not "the other's" interference in the Iraqi territory. From the side of Iran, the "Prime Minister Hussein Musavi warned, the shakiness of Saddam regime should not give rise to territorial ambitions against Iraq or its resources." And from Turkish side, "the Turkish government responded by declaring its support for preserving Iraq's territorial integrity."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Robins, Philip, P. 54

⁵⁹ Gundogan Unal, P. 5

⁶⁰ Ibid, P. 5

Fear of the Iranian leaders that Turkey is going to increase its hegemony in the region through intervention of Iraq's territory on the borders continued until the end of 1980s. The Iranian President Khamenei also was repeating on public rallies on the Iranian streets that Iraq's territorial integrity for Iran is the red-line, and Iran would do the best to prevent any "outside intervention in the Iraqi territory."⁶¹ Furthermore, in 1988, the Iranian-Turkish railroads were bombarded on the Iranian side by Iraqi aircraft. Iran blamed Turkey that Iraq had used Turkish airspace for bombarding the railway from the side of Iran. This is despite of the fact that Turkey was always rejecting such accusations and declared to be neutral between Iran and Iraq. However, the security incidents on the three countries' borders directly affected the Turkish-Iranian relations, and PKK was the main actor in these incidents.

⁶¹ Borovali F. Ali, "Kurdish Insurgencies, the Gulf War, and Turkey's Changing Role," *Conflict Quarterly*, (Fall 1987), p. 16

CHAPTER II: THE 1988-2001 PERIOD:

Both states, Iran and Turkey, did avoid direct Kurdish support until the Islamic revolution took place in Iran in 1979. The Islamic revolution of Iran opened a new phase of security and political atmosphere in the region, especially regarding to the Kurdish question and its effects on Turkish-Iranian relations. Before 1979, both countries were avoiding to openly support the Kurds against each other. That was partly related to the nature of ideological/regime system similarities between Turkey and Iran. However, the Islamic revolution destroyed those similarities between the two states. And the new Iranian Islamic regime had a different view towards the Kurds. At the same time, Iran-Iraq war, during which the Kurds were given direct support from Iran, worsened the nature of Iran and Turkey's relations, especially when dealing with the Kurds. That became clearer when it came to PKK in Northern Iraq. At the same time, at the end phases of Iran-Iraq war, Iraq was very much weakened and therefore it did not have enough power to control Kurds' activities, especially when PKK established its positions in the bordering areas of Northern Iraq.⁶²

Within the ends of Iraq-Iran war, there were serious concerns that Turkey had. First of all, as it has been already mentioned previously, Turkey had the concern that the new Iran would spread out the Islamic ideology throughout the region, and that would directly affect the internal situation of Turkey as well. Second, Turkey was afraid that the possibility of collapsing the new Islamic regime would bring in to the existence of a Kurdish state in Iran, which would be a direct threat to the Turkish national security. Therefore, for the Turkish government, the proximity to Azeri and Iranian Kurds was very much significant so that it would have a foot in Iran's internal affairs.⁶³

At the same time, Iran's concern was Turkish military involvements in Northern Iraq against PKK. Iran was concerned that Turkey was trying to increase its hegemony in the region by using PKK as an excuse. And Iran was also against any humanitarian effort that was offered by Turkish government for the Kurds originally from Iran, who were

⁶² The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)," 23 Feb 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Iran-Iraq-War>, accessed 21.4.2018

⁶³ Carley, Patricia, P. 13

settled down at refugee camps in Northern Iraq.⁶⁴ For example, Iran attacked Iranian Kurdish refugee camps in Northern Iraq in 1993 and 1996 just because these refugees were getting humanitarian aid from the Turkish government.

Robert Olson in his book, *The Kurdish Question and Turkish-Iranian Relations*, argues that during the period of 1980-2000, both countries had very serious difficulties to cooperate to be in the same line for solving the Kurdish issue. However, Olson argues, the Kurdish issue could not affect the long-term geopolitical and strategic interests of the two states. He says that the temporary political and economic interests, such as controlling of each other's territory where the Kurds are the majority, "were outweighed" by the bigger security concerns and their national stability.⁶⁵ Therefore, he says that the two countries' geopolitical and strategic interests pushed both ahead to cooperate with each other rather than to be in direct conflict. To mention an example of these "long-term strategic interests," is that Iran was focusing on increasing its participation in oil and gas networking activities in central Asia and Caspian while increasing trade activities with Turkey as well. Olson names this strategic economic interest of Iran as a "long-term" geostrategic interest while referring to Iran's fear of Turkish meddling in Northern Iraq and Iranian Azerbaijan as a "short-term" concern between the two states. On the other hand, for Turkey, both, the need of oil and gas from central Asia and Caspian and the Iran's aid for PKK in Northern Iraq were two parallel concerns.⁶⁶ From this, we can understand that for Turkey, the Turkish national security was as significant as its economic development. Therefore, Turkey did not want and was never accepting Iran's support for PKK and the other Kurdish "separatist" groups in the region.

The terrorist group PKK has been a very serious issue for Turkish national security and, therefore, Turkey has taken very serious steps to weaken it. In 1990s, it made an alliance with Israel to put pressure on Syria for expelling Abdullah Öcalan from the country. In 1996, Turkey hoped that the alliance between Turkey and Israel would weaken PKK in

⁶⁴ Gundogan Unal, p. 5

⁶⁵ Arkun Aram, p. 267.

⁶⁶ Carley, Patricia, pp. 13-14.

Syria "and in turn Iran would be derived of leverage against Turkey."⁶⁷ So, the good relations between Turkey and Israel negatively affected the Turkish-Iranian relations.⁶⁸

2.1. Four Areas of Tensions between Iran and Turkey during 1990s:

Despite of the fact that Iran and Turkey are both significant neighbors and share common economic and political interests, there are four basic tensions that Chengiz Pahlavan from Tehran University mentions to be very serious tensions between the two states during 1990s. The first tension between the two states is ideology.⁶⁹ The root of ideological differences between the two states raised from the Islamic revolution of Iran. Before the revolution, the two states were both allies of the USA, and relations between both sides were improved. However, the Iranian revolution changed all this. The Iranian Islamic (Shiite) ideology was totally against Atatürk's pro-western policies. As Pahlavan is saying, Iranian Islamic regime officials have not accepted to visit Atatürk's tomb in Turkey.⁷⁰

The second area of tensions between the two states in 1990s was the issue of relations between the West and Turkey. In Iran's view, it was not clear whether Turkey was a pro-western state in the Middle East, or it was an agent of the West. They believed that the relations between Turkey and the west have been established at the expense of Islam in the region. The new Iranian regime leaders believed that whatever the pro-western Turkey is doing to serve the West in the Middle East is "at the expense of the region's Islamic heritage."⁷¹

⁶⁷ Olson, W. Robert. *The Kurdish Question and Turkish-Iranian Relations: From WW1 to 1998*. California: Kurdish studies Series. Mazda Publishers, 1998. P. 268.

⁶⁸ Oktav Z. Özden, "Changing Security Perceptions in Turkish-Iranian Relations," *Perceptions SAM*, (Summer 2004), PP. 106-107.

⁶⁹ Tschanguiz H. Pahlavan. "Turkish-Iranian Relations: An Iranian View." in Henry J. Barkey. ed, "Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East," Washington DC: The US Institute of Peace Press. 1996, pp. 71-91

⁷⁰ Carley Patricia, pp. 14-15

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 14

The third issue between the two states is the competition for increasing their hegemonies over Caucasus and Central Asia. Both countries had great interests for increasing their influences over these regions.

The fourth issue among the four mentioned areas of conflict between the two states is the Kurdish issue. Despite of the fact that both countries share the same Kurdish issue, neither country has totally agreed together to cooperate for totally solving the issue. At the same time, neither country is accepting an independent Kurdish state in the region. Pahlavan argues that there are areas of cooperation despite of having areas of conflict between the two states. He is saying that the Kurdish issue for both states is seen as an antagonistic issue.

Shaul Bakhash, who is a professor at George Mason University, has commented on Pahlavan's paper, and he argues that Iran and Turkey have more in common than not. He agrees with Pahlavan that the primary source of tensions between the two states currently is the Islamic revolution of Iran. He is saying that if Iranian regime was continually implementing the Islamic revolution principles regarding to deals with neighbors including Turkey, "a disaster would happen between the two states' diplomatic relations..."⁷² However, he says that the "disaster" has not happened, and the Iranian officials have understood that they have more things in common with Turkey than the differences. He believes that, at the end, both countries can cooperate to reduce the tensions and remove the differences between themselves.

Bakhash also argues that Iran and Turkey regarding to the Kurdish issue "are very close to each other. Neither favors Kurdish independence." He continues and says that Iran has "restrained" its relations with PKK, and the Iranian Islamic regime officials are very much "reluctant" for working to spread out the Islamic (Shiite) ideology in Turkey.⁷³

There are similar views mentioned by other authors and academics that Turkey and Iran, despite of their differences, eventually are able to find ways of cooperation to solve the issues. Farhad Kazemi, who is a Ph.D. (Professor) at NYU Department of Politics,

⁷² Ibid, P. 13

⁷³ Ibid, p. 14

Regional Studies argues that three significant factors can identify the nature of relations between Turkey and Iran. The first factor is that the nature of relations between the two states is "dynamic" not "static." Kazemi says that the nature of the relations between these two states is that the relations have the characteristic of "self-correcting mechanism" meaning that no matter how far the differences are between the two states; eventually both will find a door to open together.⁷⁴ Kazemi states that, comparing with the past, the Iranians are much softer now than the first years of the Islamic revolution in dealing with Turkey. He gives examples of Iranian officials' view towards Atatürk and says that in the first stages of the revolution, the Iranians were considering him as "their enemy," but now the Iranian point of view towards Turkey has been remarkably changed.⁷⁵ Kazemi also says that trade and economic relations have melted down the political and ideological tensions between the two states.

Another factor that makes these two states cooperate together, according to Kazemi, is the nature of the Middle East definition. Both countries are non-Arab actors in the Middle East and both agree with each other that the Middle East should not be defined "strictly as an Arab term"⁷⁶ although each of them has the desire to expand their hegemony over the region.

Another important aspect between the two states is the Kurdish issue. Both states have faced the same issue which is the Kurdish issue. The Kurds have been culturally closer to Iran. Kazemi notes that "there is the reality that the Kurds are of Iranian origin" and so the Kurdish language is close to the Persian language as well.⁷⁷ However, these beliefs have not made the Kurds submit for the Iranians and stop asking for building their nation-state in the region. Therefore, Iran has faced the same issue that Turkey has faced regarding to the Kurdish issue. And this makes them cooperate with each other to control the issue together.

⁷⁴ Carley Patricia, P. 14.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid. *See also:* Turkey Country Review, "Appendix: Kurds and the PKK," Country Watch Incorporated, last modified 07, (2011), <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/58517343/appendix-kurds-pkk..> accessed 14.9.2017

However, regarding to the Kurdish issue, the two states have used different mechanisms to overcome the issue. And sometimes, the Kurds have been the main actor being used by one state against the other. If we consider the nature of relations between Iran and PKK in 1990s, we will easily realize how PKK has been manipulated by Iran to overcome Turkey in its regional competition with Turkey.⁷⁸

So, here we can conclude that both states, Iran and Turkey, have more in common to do together than differences to fight against each other. The Kurdish issue, and among the Kurdish issue PKK being an important actor, is one of the issues that occupy a huge space in the regional policies of both states. Despite of that both countries have differences in ideology, security, and regional interests, the nature of relations between the two states is that at the end they will naturally find a door to open together and cooperate for melting down the differences.

2.2. Iran, Turkey and Northern Iraq from the Beginnings of 1990s:

From the beginning of 1990s, the situation of Iraq directly affected the relations between Iran and Turkey. The results of Iran-Iraq war were considerable for Turkey. Turkey was concerned about the hegemony of Iran in the region, and Iran had an upper hand at the end stages of the war. Therefore, for Turkey it was important that Iran would not be able to increase its hegemony in Northern Iraq. And Iran had the same concern for Turkey too. In the beginning of 1990s, Turkey faced a huge flow of refugees from Northern Iraq, and it was a huge economic expense for Turkey despite of the humanitarian crisis behind the country. Therefore, Turkey had a great role in forming the Operation Provide Comfort (OPC) in Northern Iraq, through which no-fly zone was announced in Northern Iraq.⁷⁹

From that stage, Turkey was able to establish good relations with the Kurdish leaders of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, especially with Kurdistan Democratic Party's leader (Massud Barzani) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's leader (Jalal Talabani). And it is

⁷⁸ Bölükbaşı, Süha. Türkiye ve yakınındaki Ortadoğu. Ankara: Dış Politika Enstitüsü, 1992, pp. 51-58

⁷⁹ Ricks E. Thomas, "Operation Provide Comfort: A forgotten mission with possible lessons for Syria," FP: 6 Feb 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/06/operation-provide-comfort-a-forgotten-mission-with-possible-lessons-for-syria/>, accessed 3.2.2018. 79

worth mentioning that later in the civil war⁸⁰ between these two major parties in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Turkey had a great role for establishing peace between the two political parties. That is because stability in Northern Iraq was very much important for Turkey. By having good relations with the Northern Iraqi Kurdish political parties, Turkey was better able to stand against the PKK in the region. In 1992 and later in 2001, the two major political parties in Northern Iraq, PUK and KDP, joined Turkey and together fought against PKK in the bordering areas, Northwestern part of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Unlike Turkey, Iran was totally opposite of the OPC, and it was against the de-facto partition of Iraq. Iran was concerning about the future of this de-facto partition in Iraq. For Iran, establishing a no-fly zone in Northern Iraq and then establishing a de-facto state there for the Kurds was threatening the national security of Iran. Iran was afraid that, in the future, the Kurdistan Region would host the Iranian Kurdish opposition parties like the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDP-I). And indeed, the Iranian Kurdish political parties were later given the opportunity to settle down in the Kurdistan Region. And still their headquarters until now are mainly located (in Koya District, Southeastern part of Erbil).

Despite of that, Iran was concerning about increasing hegemony of the USA in the region. For Iran, the OPC and the intervention of the western countries in Northern Iraq was questionable. Iran never wanted the USA and the western countries to increase their hegemonies in Iraq. That is because increasing the USA hegemony was directly threatening Iran's national security, on the one hand. On the other hand, Iran was arguing that Erbil would become the center of the USA intelligence over Iran. And even still Iran has that concern about the USA position in Northern Iraq. When demonstrations started against the government in different cities of Iran, including Tehran, late in 2017, Iran directly accused Erbil to be the center of a "US intelligence plan." Iranian officials said that the plan of CIA for destabilizing Tehran was made in Erbil within the participation of Northern Iraqi officials. Later, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq released a clarification

⁸⁰ The Kurdish Civil War, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, between the PUK and KDP lasted for four years starting from 1994 until 1998

that the Iran's accusation has no base and that Iraqi Kurdistan has always respected Iran as a good neighbor.⁸¹

At the same time, Turkish-Kurdish cooperation in Northern Iraq was not of interest of Iran. Despite of the fact that the focus of Turkey during 1990s in cooperating with PUK and KDP was to stand against PKK, Iran was thinking that, in the long-term, Turkey would increase its access for the Northern Iraqi oil. And that would directly put the Iranian interests in danger over the area.⁸² In Iran's view, what was the subject of focus for the Iranian concern regarding to the mentioned matter was the Turkmen population in Northern Iraq, especially in Kirkuk. Iranian politicians believed that the Turkmen population in Kirkuk, Mosul and Erbil "might give pretext" for Turkey to control Northern Iraq economically and politically. And that would eventually change the balance of power in the region.⁸³

2.3. The 1990s: The Spring of Iranian-PKK Relations:

Even though Iranian-PKK relations were not as certain as were the Syrian-PKK relations during the 1990s, "the Iranian support to PKK" was a big concern of Turkey for the whole decade of 1990s. There are lots of writers having written pieces about PKK-Iranian relations during 1990s. Among the Turkish writers is Ismet G. Ismet who wrote a great book about PKK in 1992. He mentions the Iranian support for PKK terrorist group from the beginnings of 1990s. He says that from the early stages that PKK could establish its force, it was remarkably helped by Iran despite of getting support from Syria and the Kurdish political parties in Northern Iraq, first from KDP then from PUK.⁸⁴ Ismet is paying attention to the role of Osman Öcelan, brother of Abdullah Öcelan. He mentions that Osman Öcelan's personal relations were very strong with the Iranian revolutionary guards known as Pasdaran. He says that Osman Öcelan in the beginnings of 1990, visited

⁸¹ There were lots of reports from Iranian and Iraqi media sources talking about the accusation of Iran. This link from Rudaw is the answer of KRG denying the accusation of Iran.
<http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iran/060120181>.

⁸² Sinkaya, Bayram. Conflict and Cooperation in Turkey-Iran Relations: 1989-2001. Middle East Technical University: A Thesis Submitted for Master's Degree. Jan 2004. P. 71

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Iran and met with the Iranian Pasdaran officials and had intelligent meetings with them. After those intelligent meetings, the Iranian government directly started to aid PKK and gave them space to use the Iranian territory against the Turkish government.⁸⁵ The role of Osman Öcelan in building relations with Iran has also been described in Özden Oktav's *Changing Security Perceptions in Turkish-Iranian Relations*. According to Özden, "the PKK's seventh general meeting took place in Iran's territory," and Osman Öcelan played an important role in arranging the meeting inside Iran.⁸⁶

Among the other experts on PKK is Nihad A. Özcan. He disagrees with Ismet that the beginnings of 1990s being the start point of Iran-PKK relations. He says that the Iran-PKK relations starts from the 1980s.⁸⁷ He says one reason that pushed Iran to support PKK is the situation right after the Iranian revolution. According to Özcan, after the Iranian Islamic revolution, Iran was concerned that Turkish pro-western government would be a threat for the future of the Islamic revolution results. He says that the "US backed pro-Shah elements established an army from the east of Turkey" and they were supported by the Turkish government as well.⁸⁸ And because of that, he continues, Iran tried to aid PKK and the other opposition groups to destabilize Turkey.

Another factor that Özcan is describing as a reason that pushed Iran to aid PKK was the Iran-Iraq war. Despite of the fact that most of academic sources related to the subject point to the fact that Turkey was neutral during the Iraq-Iran war, Özcan says that "Iran believed that Turkey is siding with Saddam Hussein in the Iraq-Iran war." Therefore, he says that, Iran sided with Syria and increased its direct support to PKK for attacking Turkey.⁸⁹ He better clarifies that, part of Iran's aid from the beginnings of 1980s to PKK was going through KDP in northern Iraq. He says that Iran was aiding Massud Barzani,

⁸⁵ Ismet G. Ismet, "The PKK: A Report on Separatist Violence in Turkey, 1973–1992," *Conflict Quarterly*, Ankara: Turkish Daily News Publications, 1992, <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/view/15200/16269>, accessed 13.2.2018. P. 168

⁸⁶ Oktav Z. Özden, P. 108

⁸⁷ Özcan, A. Nihat, "İran'ın Türkiye Politikasında Ucuz ama Etkili Bir Manivela: PKK," *Avrasya Dosyası*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (Autumn 1999), p. 326

⁸⁸ Sinkaya, Bayram, P. 76

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, P. 76

leader of KDP in Northern Iraq, and through KDP the aid was going to PKK. He continues and says that by doing that so, Iran was able to strengthen the Kurdish opposition against Saddam Hussein in Northern Iraq, and it was able to better aid PKK to use it against Turkey. Özcan also says that, by doing this game, Iran on the one hand, was able to normalize its relations with the Kurds in Northern Iraq so that Turkey would not easily access the North of Iraq. On the other hand, Iran was able to strengthen PKK against Turkey.⁹⁰ Özcan goes further and gives better details about PKK relations with Iran in late 1980s. He says that in 1986, when KDP in Northern Iraq was uncomfortable with the PKK elements in Northern Iraq and the Turkish military attacks, "Iran was giving direct shelter to PKK members in its territory".⁹¹ He says that all these military and logistics aid to PKK by Iran was secret. According to Özcan, Iran wanted PKK to collect intelligent information inside Turkey. This is while Iran was struggling against the KDP-I as well. He says Iran did not want PKK to attack Turkish military groups "within the 50 kilometers close to the Iranian border" so that Iran would easily deny its support and military aid to PKK while arguing the matter with Turkish officials.⁹²

Among the other factors behind Iranian-PKK relations, there are two other very important factors. One is the "anti-imperialist discourse" and the other one is its nature of opposition to Turkey, which is the main competitor of Iran in the region. Furthermore, other adjective causes have become the basic reasons for the cooperation between Iran and PKK. Iran was asking Turkey to send back to Iran the asylum seekers of Iran who had been hosted in Turkey since the Islamic revolution. Also, the Turkish policy to Azerbaijan and the concerns of Iran regarding to the issue was another reason behind Iran and PKK relations. At the same time, Turkey was a member of NATO that is totally contradicting with the Iranian interests in the region. All these objective regional and international reasons had pushed Iran to cooperate with PKK and militarily and logistically aid the organization to destabilize Turkey.⁹³

⁹⁰ Özcan, A. Nihat, "İran'ın Türkiye Politikasında Ucuz ama Etkili Bir Manivela: PKK," pp. 334-335

⁹¹ Sinkaya Bayram, P. 76

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid, pp. 75-77

Another reason that pushed Iran to aid PKK was the situation made after the Soviet Union dissolution. When the Soviet Union was over, Iran was afraid of the hegemony of Turkey in the region. And this concern of Iran became a true threat within the independence of Azerbaijan (Sep 1991). Iran was owning about twenty millions of Azeri population inside Iran, and it was afraid that within the independence of Azerbaijan, these Azeri people "within the support of Turkey" would revolt against the Iranian government.⁹⁴ Özcan argues that, so that Iran makes sure that these threats would not become practical, it took steps ahead against Turkey. And the most important step worth to be mentioned here was the direct aid of Iran to PKK for destabilizing Turkey. And that happened especially in the provinces of Ağrı, Van, and Kars of Turkey so that it would be able to hurt the Turkish-Azerbaijani "territorial contiguity"⁹⁵

Ismet G. Ismet in his journal article about PKK, *The PKK: A Report on Separatist Violence in Turkey, 1973–1992*, clearly mentions the number of PKK elements and data of PKK members inside the Iranian territory in the beginning of 1990s. He says that in 1992, about 700-800 PKK members were settled down in the Iranian territory and were trained by Iranian intelligent forces. He continues and says that Iran was giving weapons to PKK as well. According to Ismet, Osman Öcelan was in charge for keeping and enhancing these relations between the Iranian Pasdaran forces and PKK.⁹⁶ Despite of the fact that Iran was denying such relations with PKK, Turkey was aware of the reality that PKK leaders were crossing the borders and holding intelligent meetings with Iranian Pasdaran commanders inside Iranian territory.⁹⁷ He also says that Turkey was aware of the fact that PKK was freely using the Turkish-Iranian borders from 1992 and so on. "The PKK members were using vehicles such as trucks freely in the borders to reach their targeting places to attack Turkish military positions on the borders," and these military movements were taking place within the help of Iranian Pasdaran, he says.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Sinkaya, Bayram, p. 77

⁹⁵ Lesser O. Ian, "Turkey in A Changing Security Environment," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 1, (Fall 2000), p. 183

⁹⁶ Sinkaya, Bayram, P. 77

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ismet G. Ismet, P. 205

Indeed, officials in the Turkish intelligence were aware of the fact that Iran was offering military aid, health assistance, military trainings, accommodation, and facilities in the camps to PKK members inside the Iranian territory.⁹⁹ And most of these Iranian aids to the terrorist group were taking place in the "Western Azerbaijan Province of Iran" close to the Iranian-Turkish border.¹⁰⁰ Ismet says that during the first half of the 1990s, many intelligent meetings took place between Turkey and Iran. In the meetings, Turkey was giving warnings to Iran and was providing documents proving the Iranian aid to PKK. However, he says that Iran has always denied such claims and instead has asked Turkey to stop activities of Iranian opposition elements inside the Turkish territory¹⁰¹.

Mentioning some examples can also strengthen the argument of the writers who believe that PKK was one of the main security issues between Iran and Turkey. The detaining of an Iranian vessel (the Cap Maleas) by Turkey in 1991 transiting from Bulgaria is one of the examples. The reason of detaining the vessel was that Turkey was suspicious that the vessel was carrying arming weapons to PKK.¹⁰² At the same time, Turkish contingents entered the Iranian territory to pursue their military duties against PKK "without permission of Iran" in August 1992.¹⁰³ Moreover, in 1994, nine Iranian people were killed by Turkish airstrikes while bombarding PKK positions in bordering areas of Iraq-Iran in northern Iraq. These incidents are clear examples related to PKK that have put huge effects on the relations between Iran and Turkey during 1990s.¹⁰⁴

Turkish-Iranian conflict even continued during the second half of 1990s because of PKK. During 1996, the terrorist group was able to increase its assaults on the Turkish-Iranian borders. Therefore, Turkey increased pressure on Iran to stop aiding PKK. The support

⁹⁹ Sinkaya, Bayram, P. 77

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Tekin, Ali. *The Place of Terrorism in Iran's Foreign Policy*. Ankara: Uluslararası Stratejik Arastirmalar Vakfi. EURASIA File, 1997, pp. 65-69

¹⁰² Sinkaya, Bayram, P. 78

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Tschanguiz H. Pahlavan. "Turkish-Iranian Relations: An Iranian View." in Henry J. Barkey. ed, "Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East," Washington DC: The US Institute of Peace Press. 1996. P.77

of Iran to PKK and to other radical Islamic groups of opposition in Turkey was making Turkey very much upset of Iran.¹⁰⁵

In 1997, the Turkish government already received intelligent security reports that Iran had organized special camps for PKK members and inside the camps it gives them logistic aid and trains them as well.¹⁰⁶ The same year, General Kenan Deniz, Chief of the Turkish Department of Domestic Security sent a detailed report to the Turkish General Staff. He mentioned in the report that Iran uses "terrorism for its political ends," and he clarified in the report that Iran is aiding PKK and other Islamic fundamentalists to violate Turkish national security and destabilize the Turkish society.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, during the spring of the same year, Turkish military and airstrike operations were taking place on the borders against PKK, especially in Northern Iraq. Despite of the fact that Iran was given numerous warnings to take necessary steps for stopping aids to PKK and other Islamic fundamental groups that would violate Turkish internal security, Iran continued to aid PKK during 1990s. Reportedly, by the end of 1997, "there were about 7000 PKK members being hosted and aided inside the Iranian territory."¹⁰⁸

2.4. Turkey, Iran, and PKK after the Seizure of Abdullah Öcalan (1999):

When the leader of the terrorist group, Öcalan, was arrested in February 1999, the Iranian-Turkish relations passed to another worsened phase. Bülent Ecevit, The Turkish Prime Minister mentioned that Turkey is worried about Iran's aid to PKK. In one of his speeches regarding to the matter, in July 1996, he said, "we have some complaints against Iran. The PKK's existence in Syria became nearly extinct, but Iran seems to take place of Syria. Iran takes the PKK under her wings. This is an attitude that cannot be suitable for good neighborly and friendly relations."¹⁰⁹ Soon in the same month, Turkey was accused by Iran that it had violated Iranian territory by bombarding the borders. Despite of the fact

¹⁰⁵ Atila Eralp and Özlem Tür, "İran'la Devrim Sonrası İlişkiler," in M. Benli Altunışık, ed, Türkiye ve Ortadoğu: Tarih, Kimlik, Güvenlik, İstanbul: Boyut Yay, (1999), p. 74

¹⁰⁶ Sinkaya, Bayram, P. 78

¹⁰⁷ Gunter M. Michael, "The Kurdish Problem in Turkey," Middle East Institute, Journal Article, Vol. 42, No. 3, (Summer 1988), p. 394

¹⁰⁸ Sinkaya Bayram, P. 79

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 79

that Ankara refused any "violations" against Iranian territory, Iran arrested two Turkish military members on the borders on July 22, 1999. Related to the incident, Bahman Akhavan, who was a member of the Defense Affairs Commission in the Iranian Parliament, accused Turkey for having "plans" backed by "the Western countries" to organize "a new revolution" inside Iran.¹¹⁰

Upon these accusations of the Iranian officials, the Turkish PM Ecevit answered that if Turkey has such plans to invade Iran or arrange any kind of "revolution" mentioned by the Iranian officials, "Turkey would not do that so only with two soldiers!"¹¹¹ At the same time, Turkey had already clarified to Iran that it would conduct military and airstrikes operations against PKK on the borders. And so there may be interventions of each other's territories while the operations are taking place. But this should not be translated by the Iranian government as a violation against Iranian government. The main aim of the operations was PKK, and Turkish main concern was that Iran would stop aiding PKK.¹¹²

Regarding to the incidents happened at the middle of 1999, Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu, who was the Chair of General Staff of Turkey mentioned the fact that Turkey and Iran "since 1639" had not fought against each other directly. But he said that "Iran had never wanted a strong Turkey in the region." He also continued and said that Iran wanted to show that Turkey is an "aggressive" state.¹¹³

Later in 1999, before these incidents progress more, the policy makers of both states met with each other and held a meeting. They decided that both states should be more cautious about the security issues between the two states, and they prevented the incidents between the two sides to escalate more. And later, security meetings between the two states took place. For example, in August of 1999, High Security Commissions of both countries met in Ankara. After these meeting, the situation between the two states became much more normalized.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Olson Robert, P. 877

¹¹¹ Sinkaya Bayram, P. 80

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Despite of the fact that Iran was helping PKK and was using it to destabilize Turkey, Turkey had other cards to use against Iran. For example, the Iranian KDPI¹¹⁵ reportedly many times officially asked Turkey for aiding the party, but Turkey refused to support it. The KDPI official daily press *Kurdistan* published an article on behalf of the political party praising Turkey. The article says that Turkey is a state where politics and religion are separated. It says that no one in Turkey is punished because of his or her religious beliefs and everyone is given their basic freedom and human rights. It continues comparing Turkey with Iran and says that Turkey is where that the KDPI is seeking to enhance its relations with.¹¹⁶ That was a strong card on the hands of Turkey to use against Iran as Iran was following the same policy against Turkey by supporting PKK. However, Turkey tried to avoid using this card, and throughout my research I have not found any document or confirmed information proving the relations between Turkey and KDPI for destabilizing Iran.

The PKK related incidents between the two states were day by day going to worsening the relations between Turkey and Iran. However, late in the 1990s, both states realized that they need to cooperate to solve their security issues before more escalations taking place. And that was a great reason that both countries realized the security threat of PKK between the two states, and they started to cooperate on the issue. However, that did not mean Iran directly stopped all its logistic and military aid to PKK. Later in 2000s, Iran still continued to help PKK, but the mechanism of the support was changed. There are few examples of efforts between both sides for cooperating to solve their security issues on the borders. For example, both states formed a joined security commission for cooperating and normalizing the situation on the borders. Moreover, both states formed shared subcommittees of security for cooperation on the borders. At the same time, from high level of intelligence, both countries started to cooperate. All these efforts had great impact on renormalizing the situation between the two states regarding to PKK.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, which is a prohibited party in Iran. Its headquarters are now in the Koya District of Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

¹¹⁶ Sinkaya, Bayram, P. 81

¹¹⁷ Ibid, P. 81

It is worth mentioning that in 1990s, Turkey was facing two different groups inside the Iranian regime. The first group was those Iranian leaders who were in charge for the foreign policy of the country. The second group was the radical wing of the Islamic revolution that was controlling military, Pasdaran. The first group of Iran which was the government and foreign affairs believed that Iran should collaborate with Turkey and improve its diplomatic relations with it in the region. However, the second one, Pasdaran (revolutionary guard of the country) believed that "PKK is a great card on the hands of Iran to use against Turkey" in its regional competition. The second group is known as the radical group of the country, and, because they were controlling military, the security issues and control of the borders were on their hands. And that was the base of the security issues between Turkey and Iran regarding to PKK during 1990s.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Akyol Taha, "İran'ın terörden aklanma fırsatı!," **Milliyet**, 4 April 2002, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2002/04/04/siyaset/siy02.html>, accessed 21.4.2017.

CHAPTER III: TURKISH-IRANIAN RELATIONS AND PKK DURING 2001-2010:

Within the beginnings of 2000s, the nature of relations between Turkey and Iran remarkably changed. Positive signs appeared between both sides to cooperate and solve their security issues, especially on the borders. Specifically speaking about PKK, the aid of Iran that was offered to PKK during 1990s, very much decreased, and the focus of the Iranian officials from this stage and on was to improve their diplomatic relations with Turkey. We can also say that economic relations between the two sides were the backbone of the diplomatic relations and security improvements as well.

3.1. The Beginnings of 2000s: Stage of Normalizing Relations:

The political atmosphere of Turkey changed within the beginnings of 2000s. AK Party provided Turkey within new ways of diplomatic relations with neighbors, and Iran was one of the significant countries that was focused on. At the same time, the USA invasion of Iraq in 2003, made both states reconsider their security issues and cooperate to some extent for solving the issues. That was particularly important for both states to consider the possibility of "establishing an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq" after the toppling down of Saddam Hussein's regime.¹¹⁹ Neither Turkey nor did Iran want to see an independent Kurdish state in Iraq that would directly affect their national security after 2003. Therefore, Turkey, unlike the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein, did not support the 2003 American invasion and refused to allow American forces and allies to open the Northern front from the Turkish territory against Saddam Hussein's regime.¹²⁰

That was a big shock to Washington. And the more diplomatic relations between Turkey and the USA were going to breakdown, the higher possibility Iran would have to advance its diplomatic relations and cooperation with Turkey. Therefore, Iran tried to find this as a great opportunity to be closer to Turkey. During the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the relations between Turkey and the US were at the lowest level and "suffered a complete

¹¹⁹ McCurdy Daphne, "Turkish-Iranian Relations: When Opposites Attract," *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 2. P. 93

¹²⁰ Ibid.

breakdown."¹²¹ While Turkey refused to take any position cooperating with the USA and allies against the Iraqi regime, the Kurds in Northern Iraq became the "best US allies" against Saddam Hussein. And following the fall of Saddam, for the first time in 2005, the Kurds in Northern Iraq with the support of the USA and allies, achieved a federal region officially being submitted in the 2005 Iraqi constitution.

Moreover, PKK in 2004, called off the unilateral ceasefire that was announced for five years. It started again violating the Turkish society and attacking the Turkish military forces on the borders. The escalation of the PKK violence again on the borders was another big concern of Turkey that it had to cooperate with Iran for solving the issue. At the same time, the Turkish public hugely blamed the American forces regarding the escalation of PKK violence in Northern Iraq. And that situation further complicated Turkish-American relations as well. All these tensions between Turkish and American (Iran's enemy of the time) relations regarding to Iraqi developments after the 2003 US invasion provided a situation which positively helped Turkey and Iran to reconsider their security issues, diplomatic, trade, and economic relations as well.¹²²

3.2. The Emergence of PJAK and Security Agreements between Turkey and Iran:

The new political changes in the region had made Turkey put PKK as the priority regarding deals with Iran. Soon after the Iraqi regime's fall and the PKK violence escalation in Northern Iraq, Turkey went ahead to sign security agreements with Iran. In July 2004, the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, visited Tehran. And following his visit, a security agreement was signed between Ankara and Tehran. In the security agreement, PKK was clearly labeled as a terrorist organization and as a real threat to both states. And so, both states decided to cooperate seriously to fight it.¹²³ At the same time, PKK relations with Iran were not good, and PKK had organized its new branch under the name of PJAK. And that had intensified the Iranian officials to cooperate with

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Taşpınar Ömer, "Turkey Eyes the Shia Crescent," Brookings, 12 Feb, 2007, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/turkey-eyes-the-shia-crescent/>, accessed 14.2.2018.

¹²³ Larrabee Stephen, "Turkey Rediscovered the Middle East," Foreign Affairs: July/August 2007, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2007-07-01/turkey-rediscovered-middle-east>, accessed, 11.9.2017.

Turkey regarding to the matter. Therefore, defeating PKK and protecting their borders became the priority for both states to step ahead.

From the point that Iran signed a security agreement with Turkey in 2004, Iran seemed to be very serious in cooperating with Turkey against PKK. And mainly it was not only because PKK was a threat to its neighbor, but because from then PKK became a direct threat to Iran as well. That is why after 2004, Iran was seriously bombarding the borders targeting PKK/PJAK positions in the areas of Qandil Mountains and Sidakan area, Northeastern part of Erbil Province in Northern Iraq. Many academics and specialists were following the new situation that was brought between Turkish-American and Turkish-Iranian relations at the time. And many believed that, regarding to PKK, the USA is only speaking while Iran is acting. That is why the Turkish government would rely on Iran rather than on the USA to solve its security issue with PKK.¹²⁴ One of the writers who greatly pointed to this fact is Soner Çağaptay, who is originally a Turkish scholar based on America and currently the head of Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He said in a testimony in 2004, that if we consider the Turkish media, the Turkish public and even the Turkish government have realized that Iran is acting while the USA is only speaking regarding to the issue of PKK. He is saying that the same day that the USA department of state is announcing statement of delivering security through cooperation with Turkey against PKK on the Turkish borders, at the same day Iran is bombarding PKK positions on the ground without publishing any statement on paper.¹²⁵ He continues and says that the USA is only speaking but never acting and cooperating with Turkey against PKK while Iran is acting against PKK but not speaking. He also says that even the Turkish media has realized that fact. If you read the first page of a Turkish newspaper, you would see that it has been written as the headline "Iran last night bombarded PKK positions on the borders." "At the same time," he continues, "you would also see from the last page of the newspaper a column that mentioning "yesterday morning the USA state department announced that

¹²⁴ McCurdy, Daphne, P. 96

¹²⁵ McCurdy Daphne, P. 96

they will support and cooperate with Turkey against PKK to secure and protect the Turkish territory and the borders from terrorists."¹²⁶

Following the changes, Iran was also focusing on the complexity of Turkish-American relations and trying to use the situation for its own benefits. And the best way to do that was to prove for the Turkish government that the USA is supporting PKK/PJAK on the borders. Ali Larijani, who was the head of National Security Council of Iran at that time, visited Ankara in May 2006. During his visit, he told the Turkish officials that he had "proven documents showing the USA support for PKK/PJAK on the borders."¹²⁷ He said that the USA commanders in Northern Iraq had meetings with the PKK leaders on the borders in the Spring of the same year.¹²⁸

Relating to PJAK and American relations, there were reports showing, including articles from the New Yorker Magazine of the USA as well as from other American, Turkish, and Iranian media sources, that American forces were aiding PJAK forces on the borders "to destabilize the internal situation of Iran."¹²⁹ At the same time, in 2007, Rahmani Ahmedi who was the representative of PJAK visited Washington officially to demand military and logistics' support from the American government. However, it was not clear that he could obtain any "open" support from the American government. He was not even able to "secure a meeting with officials in Washington."¹³⁰ At the same time, there was intelligent information received by the Turkish police that PKK members "were using American weapons on the borders against Turkey."¹³¹ The Turkish government officials did not directly blame the American government for "giving arms to PKK." However, they criticized the American forces in Iraq for "mismanaging" their forces and their

¹²⁶ Çağaptay, Soner, "Turkey After the July 2007 Elections: Domestic Politics and International Relations," The Washington Institute: Policy Analysis, 13 May 2007, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkey-after-july-2007-elections-domestic-politics-and-international-relati>, accessed 12.2.2018.

Also see, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2012/>

¹²⁷ NPR News Analysis, "The American Weapons in Iraq making their Way to Turkey," 24 August 2007, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=13928634>, accessed 24.5.2017.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ McCurdy Daphne, P. 96.

¹³¹ NPR News Analyses. American Weapons in Iraq: August 24, 2007.

military weapons in Iraq. Turkey was blaming that after the USA invasion of Iraq in 2003, there was a rapid increase of weapons and there was a security vacuum for controlling military weapons. And most of the weapons were the USA made weapons. That is why the Turkish officials' concern of PKK in Northern Iraq and the blame of the "mismanagement" of weapons in the society was going to the American forces. In 2007, Abdullah Gül, the Turkish Foreign Minister of the time, mentioned the fact that America along with some European countries were giving their weapons to Iraq so that the new military of Iraq will be rebuilt. And at the end, many of these weapons were easily transferred to PKK, "and the Turkish forces have seized some."¹³² All these tensions between Turkey and America and the complicated security circumstance in Iraq was of benefit of Iranian interests to be close to Turkey and try to push Turkey for joining Iran against America in Iraq. However, the fact that Iran had given "50 locations" inside the Iranian territory to about "1200 PKK members" and training them all in 1990s, Iran's financial aid to Islamic radical groups in Turkey for violating Turkish society in 1990s, and all other military aid of Iran for PKK in the past were the reason that Turkey was reluctant to openly go ahead and fully cooperate with Iran and neglect America in the region."¹³³ In another word, Turkey was smart enough to understand that Iran is not going to cooperate with Turkey for the sake of solving the Turkish security issues in the region, but it was because Iran at that time was hesitating about the American hegemony in the region and it wanted Turkey to be close to Iran against America. On the other hand, Iran itself was facing the security issue with PJAK, and PKK/PJAK was no longer only a threat to Turkey but it was a threat to Iran as well. That is why Turkey was going ahead to improve its diplomatic and economic relations with Iran as well as cooperating for solving the security issue of PKK. But that cooperation was not on the expense of Turkish-American relations. Despite of that the Turkish new policy of "Zero Problems with Neighbors" allowed to establish good relations with Iraq and Northern Iraqi Kurds as well. In fact, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq later (especially KDP which has had the upper hand in the KRG cabinet) became much closer to Turkey than to Iran. And the

¹³² "Bunlar Irak ordusuna gönderdiğimiz silahlar," Milliyet: July 7, 2007.

¹³³ The Middle East Roundtable. Vol. 4, No. 18. May 18, 2006, www.bitterlemons-international.org, accessed 14.8.2017.

heart of these improvements between Turkey and the Kurds in Iraq was the oil and trade relations.

3.3. The 2007 Events:

In 2007, PKK increased its terrorist activities against Turkish military forces especially on the borders. At the same time, casualties from Turkish civilians were reported out of terrorist activities inside Turkey the same year. Therefore, a resolution was passed by the Turkish Parliament to cross borders of Iraq and Iran and conduct security operations against PKK. The move of Turkish military was very well supported by the Turkish public. However, the Turkish government a bit hesitated to take actions. The Turkish PM Erdogan few weeks after passing the resolution in the parliament had a meeting with American President George W. Bush, and they discussed the matter. In the meeting, President Bush clearly described PKK as a "common enemy" for both Turkey and the USA. And he showed the America's readiness to cooperate and help the Turkish government to conduct military movements against PKK in Northern Iraq. Following the meeting, an intelligent cooperating center between the USA and Turkey was established in Ankara. The main duty of the center was intelligence work over PKK activities on the borders. From that year and on, the Turkish-American military and diplomatic relations (regarding to PKK concern) started to normalize again. That normalization of the relations between Turkey and the USA was known as "strategic partnership" between the two states. However, it is very much important that on reality, the USA has done little to cooperate with Turkey against PKK, and Turkey has not been satisfied with the USA assistance level to Turkey against PKK.

The Turkish-US cooperation against PKK in Northern Iraq from 2007 until the start of the Arab Spring (Dec 18, 2010) did not change. At the same time, during that duration, cooperation between the USA and Turkey did not really put huge effects on Turkish-Iranian relations. Iran that was considering the USA as its enemy was not comfortable with the positive steps between Turkey and the USA, but that did make Iran avoiding cooperation with Turkey. During the time, Iran really wanted Turkey to launch heavy attacks against PJAK/PKK on the borders to eradicate them. At the same time, the Iranian officials many times were repeating that Iran was ready to cooperate with Turkey for eradicating "terrorists" on the borders. For example, in Dec 2007, the Chairman of

Foreign Affairs Committee in the Turkish Parliament visited Tehran and met with his counterpart in Iran. The Iranian official in a press conference openly said that Iran was ready to cooperate with Turkey, and he did not mention the Turkish-US relations and cooperation on the borders even in a word.¹³⁴ This shows the reality that Iranian-Turkish relations in the time was not affected by Turkish-US relations because Iran really needed Turkey to cooperate with it and fight against PJAK, which was a direct threat to Iran.

The next year (2008), Turkey launched a heavy military operation against PKK and killed tens of their members despite of destroying their offices and logistic stores in Northern Iraq. While the operation was taking place, Iran highly strengthened its security measures with Iraq in order not to let PKK members run away to Iran's territory. Following the operation of Turkey, the Iranian President visited Baghdad and said that Iraq's sovereignty should be respected by Turkey. He also said that he has understood very well the concern of PKK on the borders, and the issue should be solved between Turkey, Iran and Iraq. That speech of Iran's President regarding to the Turkish military attack was a negative point in the Iran-Turkey relations regarding to that time being situation of both states against PKK. That is because Turkey was expecting the full support of Iran regarding to fighting against PKK/PJAK on the borders.

The Turkish-Iranian intelligence security cooperation for fighting PKK/PJAK on the borders continued. In 2008, very important intelligent meetings took place between the two sides. The Iranian-Turkish High Security Commission meetings between the two sides took place in Ankara and Tehran. The Iranian intelligence was counting PJAK and PKK as a one organization under two different names. And regarding to that, Turkey was on the same line and arguing that PJAK is just another name for PKK. Therefore, both sides had come to the realization that PKK/PJAK are direct threats for both countries' national interests.¹³⁵ In 2008, both states more focused on border controlling and security cooperation on the borders.

The security cooperation between the two countries after 2008 was allowing both states to interfere the other's territory while the military operation was going to take place by

¹³⁴ Sever Opcit, "Turkish PM's New Allegation Against Iran," Tehran Times, 4 July 1999.

¹³⁵ Radikal, "12. Türkiye-İran Yüksek Güvenlik Komisyonu Toplantısı," 14 April 2008.

the other state. At the same time, there are reports proving that both countries had launched shared operations against PKK camps and positions in Qandil Mountains in Northern Iraq.¹³⁶ At the same time, the two states were very much sharing intelligent information with each other about PKK/PJAK movements and activities on the borders.¹³⁷

The Turkish-Iranian military cooperation against PKK terrorist group was indeed a challenge for Turkish foreign relations. On the one hand, Turkey was cooperating on a very high level of intelligence with Iran against PKK. On the other hand, Turkish-US intelligence cooperation against PKK was also going very well. That was challenging because the USA was not comfortable and was worried that Turkey sharing the USA intelligence information with Iran. And Turkey was refusing that complain of the USA and arguing that Turkey would not share the USA information with Iran, but the security circumstance of the time had made Turkey work closely with both sides."¹³⁸

Despite of the fact that the wake of American invasion in Iraq changed the nature of relations and cooperation between Iran and Turkey regarding to border security and fighting against PKK, it is worth mentioning that both countries had different interests in Iraq. After the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran started to involve the internal situation of Iraq and helped the Shiite dominant of the country. And that was not something with which Turkey would be happy. That is because increasing the hegemony of Iran in the whole of Iraq, including Northern Iraq, would decrease Turkish hegemony in the country. And as the result, Iran would win the game. Furthermore, both countries have had different views towards American forces in Iraq. Iran was aiming that American forces would soon leave Iraq. Iran's aim for that was to militarily and politically get benefited from the security vacuum that was made out of the American forces withdrawal from Iraq. However, Turkey was not rushing to pullout the American forces in Iraq because there was a possibility of power vacuum in Iraq after the withdrawal of the USA forces. And that power vacuum would strengthen PKK on the borders. And as the result

¹³⁶ McCurdy Daphne, P. 98.

¹³⁷ The Terrorism Focus, "The Turkish Officials Confirm Intelligence and Military Cooperation against Terrorists with Iran," June 10, 2008.

¹³⁸ McCurdy Daphne, P. 99.

the country that was going to be benefited from this power vacuum was Iran by controlling the essential pillars of Iraqi government through the Shiite political parties in Iraq. Therefore, we can say that the military cooperation between Iran and Turkey regarding to PKK was not meaning that the two states did not have any other strategic and diplomatic issues in Iraq.¹³⁹

3.4. Cemil Bayik and Iran:

Cemil Bayik, who is a leadership council member of Koma Civaken Kurdistan (KCK) that is a terrorist umbrella organization under which PKK is part of it, has remarkable relations with Iran. There are reports that even Bayik has his own house in Urmia Province of Iran.¹⁴⁰ According to a research analysis done on the relations between Bayik and Iran, by Toole O. Pam, Bayik is the dynamo of relations between Iran and PKK. Pam points to the fact that that in 2008, Cemil Bayik along with a huge group of PKK terrorist members headed to Iran due to Turkish airstrikes on Qandil Mountains. We mentioned before that the strong relationship and cooperation between Iran and Turkey after the American invasion of Iraq increased the shared security measures between both countries against PKK on the borders. And we specifically said that in 2008, when Turkish security operation took place against PKK/PJAK in Qandil Muntains, Iran closed the borders so that PKK members would not run away to Iran. However, the evidence that Pam mentions here that Bayik along with "a huge group of PKK members" has left to Iran due to Turkish airstrikes is a prove that Iran was still in relations with PKK secretly while openly showed to cooperate with Turkey.¹⁴¹

The relationship between Cemil Bayik and Iranian leaders has been also talked about in many other sources as well. And the recent changes after the Arab Spring have affected the security posture of the region. The security incidents and changes have made PKK leaders, especially Cemil Bayik, and the Iranian military and intelligent leaders meet together and hold secret meetings. For example, Qasim Sulaimani, the head of the revolutionary guards of Iran known as the dynamo of Iran's intelligence in Iraq, has met

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Toole O. Pam, "The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has been a thorn in Turkey's side for decades," BBC News Profile: The PKK, 15 Oct 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7044760.stm>, accessed 14.7.2017.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

with Bayik in Northern Iraq, according to a BBC report. In the Report that has been published in Nov 9, 2016, it has been mentioned that Sulaimani and Bayik had met earlier the same year in the province of Sulaimaniyah in Northern Iraq, which is a PUK controlled area. That meeting shows the reality that PUK and PKK both have been in good relations with each other and have been together in good relations with Iran as well.

The nature of relations between Iranian Shiite paramilitary groups and PKK in Northern Iraq is also another sign of good relations between PKK leaders and Iran. That is, without Iran's green light, the Iranian backed Shiite military groups in Iraq cannot have good relations with PKK. What is seen since the last years of the second decade of this century is that PKK has established very strong ties with the Iraqi Shiite dominant government and the Iranian backed Shiite forces in Iraq.

CHAPTER IV: THE IMPACT OF SYRIAN CRISIS ON TURKISH-IRANIAN RELATIONS: (PKK FACTOR)

The Syrian crisis in general and the Northern Syrian PYD/PKK controlled area has a profound impact on Turkish-Iranian relations. We have a paradox here where the Kurdish factor seems to have initially driven Iran and Turkey apart and complicated the bilateral relations between the two countries. However, the Northern Syrian factor has recently forced the two countries to some form of regional cooperation and in the future the desire of Turkey and Iran to prevent the emergence of a political entity in Northern Syria under PKK will be a strengthening factor for the bilateral relations. It is anticipated that the Syrian and Iraqi regimes which share the same concern will join Turkey and Iran in this regional effort to contain or even destroy the Northern Syria PYD/PKK experience. Nevertheless, the success of this regional effort will be dependent on the future of Russian and American stand towards PYD.

In this chapter, the factor of non-state actors in the current situation of the Middle East will be explained. The reasons of changing the traditional political map of the Middle East will be mentioned. Then specifically talking about the Syrian crisis, Turkey and Iran will be focused on. The impact of Syrian crisis in general on Turkish-Iranian relations will be explained. We will then particularly mention the rise of Northern Syrian territory under PYD¹⁴²/PKK hegemony as the main reason that affected the regional policies of Turkey and Iran. In the rise of PYD in Northern Syria, we will answer questions like who is supporting PYD and why? Then we will proceed to explain and analyze the different views with which Iran and Turkey initially had about the emergence of PKK/PYD in North Western Syria. Here in this stage, we will try to give four main groups that, up to the date that this research is covering (2015), had an effective role in the crisis. When we understand the nature of these groups, their antagonists and their supporters, we will almost understand the goals and interests of each main actor that is supporting them including Iran and Turkey. Finally, we will reflect upon the Iranian ambitions and

¹⁴² Democratic Union Party (PYD) found in Northern Syria in 2003. According to the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), PYD is a PKK wing in Syria. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>, accessed 23.4.2018.

strategic goals in the region, taking Syria as an example, and why Turkey is trying to limit the hegemony of Iran in Syria.

4.1. Non-State Actors in the Current Middle Eastern Changes: PKK Figure as a Terrorist Actor in Syrian Crisis:

The Middle East currently experiences a number of non-state actors which have armed power and controlled specific areas as their respective territories. These non-state actors have become a challenge for the nation-state system in the Middle East. This is because these actors have been able to control their territories and peruse their foreign policy which is totally contradicting the sovereign nation-state system policy. Scholars argue that we are in need of new paradigms for defining these non-state actors “as the state-centric Foreign Policy Analysis paradigms do not fit these actors.”¹⁴³ Few examples of non-state actors that have recently affected the international politics and the international relations of the Middle East are the PKK terrorist group (which is our focus here), Kurds in both Syria and Iraq, the Islamic state, and Hezbollah of Lebanon.¹⁴⁴

“By their mere presence,” Jossenlin and Wallace argue that “non-state actors can only flourish within a relatively peaceful and stable international system, with an underlying consensus about the rules of international interaction and the legitimacy of the state units.”¹⁴⁵ These non-state actors do not only emerge within a dynamic time of the lack of state central authority, but they also emerge in times of conflicts practicing their own authority by having their own militias available and controlling specific territories in particular areas. In these specific territories, these non-state actors totally peruse their own foreign policy within the particular controlled territory.

Rainer Baumann and Frank Stengel have mentioned in a literature review published in the Foreign Policy that attention for analyzing non-state actors have increased since 1990s in international politics. These two writers have noticed that most of international relations’ scholars have stick to “traditional topics” while they do have noticed that none-

¹⁴³ Van den Berge, “Analyzing Middle Eastern Armed Non-State Actors’ Foreign Policy,” Leiden University, Institute of Security and Global Affairs, (Summer 2016).

¹⁴⁴ Gunter M. Michael. “The Kurds and the Future of Turkey.” Palgrave Macmillan. 15 May 1997. P. 43.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

state actors are included in some developments and analyses. Baumann and Stengel focus on the process of decision making and how the non-state actors are involved in the decision-making in the policy arenas. Furthermore, they continue asking how decision making in non-state actors is analyzed in different settings, how they are applicable and how they can be modified.

Considering the Middle East politics, we should ask questions like what has been the reason of weakening the political map of the Middle East? What has caused the too many changes, ups and downs, in the traditional political map of the region? Among other factors, there have been political, economic, military, and sociological factors being the reason of these changes in the region. These reasons can be totally applied for the change of traditional state system in Syria. In Syria, civil war, the absence of strong legitimate state institutions, and different motivations and interests of different actors have been the reason for changing the traditional state system. The Economist has recently concluded that "across the Middle East, non-state actors increasingly set the agenda, challenging governments, overthrowing them or prompting them to retrench behind increasingly repressive controls."¹⁴⁶ Interestingly enough, some scholars have been arguing that in the Middle East there have been only two states remained in the region which are Turkey and Iran. The others, they argue, including Syria, Kurds, Iraq, ISIS and etc can be defined as none-state actors of the region.¹⁴⁷

4.2. PKK in Turkish-Iranian Relations before the Syrian Crisis:

Right after the 1979 Islamic revolution of Iran, Turkish-Iranian relations normally experienced downturn. Turkey has accused Iran for supporting radical and fundamental Islamic groups opposing Turkey. However, the two countries still have managed to economically cooperate and sustain in good relations. Despite all that, there has been another very important issue between the two countries which is the PKK terrorist group.

¹⁴⁶ The Economist, "The Rule of the Gunman: Why Post-Colonial Arab States are Breaking Down:" 11 Oct 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21623771-why-post-colonial-arab-states-are-breaking-down-rule-gunman>, accessed 13.4.2017.

¹⁴⁷ Gunter M. Mechile, "Iraq, Syria, ISIS and the Kurds: Geostrategic Concerns for the U.S. and Turkey," The Middle East Policy Council, <http://www.mepc.org/iraq-syria-isis-and-kurds-geostrategic-concerns-us-and-turkey>, accessed 16.6.2017.

When the Turkish military operations started against PKK in Turkey and the North of Iraq, Turkey accused Iran for protecting PKK and providing them with full logistics and military support. Iran has been rejecting such accusations, however. While bombarding PKK military spots in the borders of Iran, these tensions increased more between the two states. The tensions specifically increased in 1990s because Iran and PKK relations during the 1990s have reportedly been strong, as mentioned in the previous chapters. For example, in May 1995, the Turkish government conducted a very strong military attack on the PKK basis in the Iranian borders. And that bored Iran as well. In the spring of 1996, a number of crisis between the two countries happened when each of them accused the other for spying and supporting of terrorism. Yet, in 1996 Turkey added another concern when PKK strongly attacked Turkish forces from the borders of Iran. The president of Turkey visited the borders and accused Iran of supporting terrorism. However, during his presidency between 1996 and 1997, Necmettin Erbakan took important steps to strengthen relations and cooperate with Iran to solve the issues. But he was meanwhile criticized by the public opinion in Turkey for visiting a country that supports “anti-Turkish terrorism.”¹⁴⁸

Visits took place between the Turkish President to Iran and Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to Turkey. But these visits could not decrease the concerns of both governments accusing each other. Later in 1996, the Turkish government continued arguing that Iran was supplying logistics and heavy military weapons, including rockets of Katyusha, to PKK. After that in 1997, the Iranian ambassador was embroiled by Islamic fundamentalists in Ankara, and that more deepened the tensions between the two countries.¹⁴⁹ Relations subsequently between Iran and Turkey strengthened somehow. Leaders and decision makers of both countries were lunching different visits and were exchanging ideas of cooperation. The most important cooperation was the “Neighborhood Forum” that took place in 1998. The forum was basically aiming for

¹⁴⁸ Aras Bülent and Polat K. Rabia, "From Conflict to Cooperation: Desecuritization of Turkey's Relations with Syria and Iran," *Sage Journals*, V. 39, No. 5, (2008).

¹⁴⁹ Arkun, Aram. "The Kurdish Question and Turkish-Iranian Relations: From World War I to 1998 by Robert Olson," *Iranian Studies*, Vol 33, No. 1/2 (Winter-Spring, 2000), pp. 266-269

improving relations between the Middle Eastern neighbors. However, all these improvements could not find a solution for the Turkish concern regarding Iran's aids for PKK.

4.3. How Do Turkey and Iran Play in the Syrian Crisis?

The Turkey-Iran relations has long history. Both states have been in strong political and military competition for increasing their power in the region. The rise of the Arab Spring in the region in the second decade of the twenty first century can be seen as a remarkable historical stage that affected the strategic relations between Turkey and Iran. This is directly felt when we consider the Syrian crisis.

Since the start of revolts in Syria against Bashar al Asad in 2011, Iran and Turkey both have tried to maximize their power in the country. They have backed different groups and militias in Syria to gain their strategic goals. Despite of the fact that there is a common enemy which is the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), each of the countries, Iran and Turkey, has been supporting groups that harm the strategic goals of the other in the region. For Turkey, the rise of a political identity in Northern Syria under PYD/PKK is the red-line and must not happen because it would directly affect the Turkish national security. However, Iran has been the direct and indirect supporter of PYD in the country. With the help of Iran, Russia, and the USA leading international coalition, the PYD has been able to establish a political identity in the North of Syria naming the controlled region as "Rojava." The rise of Northern Syria under PYD/PKK is a serious concern for Turkey. From here, the rest of this chapter will explain the general impacts of the Syrian crisis on the Turkish-Iranian relations. Basically the reasons that Turkey involved in the Syrian crisis will be explained. Then the humanitarian crisis in the country and how it has economically affected Turkey as the closest neighbor of Syria will be discussed. At the same time, the rise of the PYD/PKK in Syria and to what extent this is related to the Kurdish issue in Turkey will be explained. To what extent will the rise of PYD in Syria affect the Turkish national security? Another stage of this chapter is about the different political and military groups in Syria. Questions like who is supporting whom and who is against whom in Syria, will be answered. The last stage of the chapter will be about Iran's hegemonic strategies in the region especially in Syria. The main reasons that are

importantly effective why Turkey involved the Syrian crisis to limit Iran's increasing hegemony in the region will be explained.¹⁵⁰

4.4. PYD/PKK Controlled Northwest of Syria:

First of all, if we go back to the recent policy of the Turkish government, especially within the start of AK Party rule, the focus of Turkish foreign policy has mostly been on the Middle East. That means the Middle Eastern countries, especially the neighbors, became the focus of Turkey to strengthen its political and economic relations with. The policy of (Zero Problems with Neighbors) was declared and implemented by the Turkish Government. It was successful for Turkey in a way that it enhanced the Turkish figure and the Turkish influence in the region. However, with the erupt of the Arab Spring, the Zero Problem policy has been less effective. That is because "zero problems with neighbors" mainly means zero problems with regimes of neighboring countries. And when there is democratic upheaval with these neighboring countries, it is clear that Turkey would not continue supporting these regimes at the time that Turkey is a NATO member and has an effective place in dealing with the international coalition regarding to the regional changes.¹⁵¹

The rise of the PYD/PKK in Northern Syria is one of the serious problems about which Turkey is concerned. The PYD/PKK controlled region in Northern Syria is consisted of three cantons and has declared its autonomy. The cantons of Cizire, Afrin, and Kobani are the three cantons each of which is an autonomous canton through the federalist system that was declared by PYD in March 17, 2017 under the name of "Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria." It is important here to note that since the Operation Olive Branch of Turkey in the beginnings of 2018, Afrin canton has been officially taken out from the PYD/PKK and is under Turkish/Turkish backed local authorities now. The only

¹⁵⁰ Serdar Guner, "The Kurdish-Syrian War of Attrition: The Water Dispute," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Jan-Mar 1997, Vol. 20, No. 1, p105

¹⁵¹ Interview with Sinan Ulgen, "Policy of Zero Problems with Neighbors Successful for Turkey," *CARNEGIE EUROPE*, 2011, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2011/12/18/policy-of-zero-problems-with-neighbors-successful-for-turkey-pub-46280>, accessed 5.4.2017.

two cantons remained under control of PYD/PKK now (May 2018) are Cizire and Kobani.

In order to have a better understanding of the context of PYD/PKK controlled Northern Syrian territory, we would like to give a brief background about each of the three cantons. The population of Cizire Canton is about 1,600,000 and it declared its autonomy in January 21st of 2014. Afrin's population is approximately more than one million, and it was under the same system of PYD/PKK from January 29th of 2014 to March 2018. Kobani Canton is populated between 350 and 400 thousand and it declared its autonomy in January 27th of 2014. The total population of all Northern Syria, including Afrin, was 2.5 million people before. However, it had increased to 4.6 million people by 2015, according to a NYT report titled as "A Dream of Secular Utopia in ISIS Backyard."¹⁵² And the capital of the region under PYD/PKK control is Qamishlo (Qamislo).

In terms of military groups, the major military group in Northern Syria is People's Protection Units (YPG) which is a branch of PYD (PKK). The number of its members was 60,000 by the end of 2016. In 2017, YPG added other 10 new battalions each consisted about 300 members. And they exceeded 100.000 members by the second half of 2017.¹⁵³

Now, who is supporting PYD? Why is Turkey concerned? This is the main question that is going to give us details on our focus of the subject. By answering this question, we will understand the whole picture of the regional competition between Iran and Turkey, and we will understand where the tensions start in Syrian crisis. The first actor that is supporting PYD in Northern Syria is the United States of America (the USA). The USA is helping PYD for a number of reasons. The most important reason is that PYD has been seriously fighting against ISIS, and defeating ISIS is the main focus of the USA in the region. Second, PYD has been the most organized and internally united military group

¹⁵² Enzinna Wes, "A Dream of Secular Utopia in ISIS Backyard," *Nytimes*, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/magazine/a-dream-of-utopia-in-hell.html?_r=0 , accessed 14.4.2017.

¹⁵³ Dolamari Mewan, "Syrian Kurdish YPG will increase number of fighters to 100,000 in 2017." *K24*, 21 March 2017, <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/ad2a1bc1-ffb8-4253-9f65-213c8add1fa3/Syrian-Kurdish-YPG-will-increase-number-of-fighters-to-100-000-in-2017>. Accessed 21.4.2017.

among the other military groups of Syria. Next, securing the oil resources in the near future in Northern Syria that are now controlled by PYD is another reason that the USA is helping PYD. Furthermore, PYD is a non-religious secular group, which is indeed essential for the USA because the USA is more likely to help secular groups against radical religious groups.¹⁵⁴

The second actor that is openly supporting PYD in Northern Syria is the International Coalition forces known as Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF – OIR) consisted of 30 countries led by the USA. Almost the same reasons that mentioned above can be applied for explaining why the International Coalition helps PYD. However, each country that has a hand in the International Coalition has its own interests and goals. For example, France is helping the Kurds because it seems that it does not want to repeat the mistakes of the past that it made in the region. After the First World War, France had a huge impact in dividing the borders of the Middle East. In that division of the borders, no place was given to the Kurds who have been, as one of the major nations of the region, sharing their own cultural and traditional characteristics like other nations in the Middle East. Now, the same picture of post First World War seems to be to be drawn again. Therefore, France does not want to repeat its mistakes in the region because giving to the Kurds their own independent territory seems to be a better choice in order to solve the regional issues in the long term.¹⁵⁵

Russia is also another actor that helped PYD in Syria. The reason that Russia was helping them is that, same as the USA, they had a common enemy which was ISIS. Russia, to a lot of extent, supported the Federalist System that has been announced by the PYD in Northern Syria, with the claim that PYD should not ask for toppling down the regime of Assad.¹⁵⁶ At the same time, Russia had openly trained the YPG forces militarily in

¹⁵⁴ Malsi Jared, "U.S. Arming of Syrian Kurdish Militias Could Complicate Relations With Turkey," TME: May 2017, <http://time.com/4773999/turkey-ygp-arming-militias-donald-trump/>, accessed 14.4.2017.

¹⁵⁵ Ricks E. Thomas, "Operation Provide Comfort: A forgotten mission with possible lessons for Syria," FP: 6 Feb 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/06/operation-provide-comfort-a-forgotten-mission-with-possible-lessons-for-syria/>, accessed 3.2.2018.

¹⁵⁶ Kaya Karen, "A Different War on Terrorism: The U.S, Turkey and the PKK," Small Wars Journal, 2012, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/a-different-war-on-terrorism-the-us-turkey-and-the-pkk>, accessed, 22.3.218.

Northern Syria, for example in Afrin area. Last but not least, the PYD/PKK has never been against the Syrian Regime, which should be the main reason that they have been welcomed by Russia and Iran as well.

There are a lot of other local and international actors supporting the PYD in Syria. No need to be mentioned, PYD is ideologically and militarily a branch of PKK, a fact that is denied by some. PKK and PYD have the same ideology, same language dialect, same nationality, common borders and common interests. At the same time, in terms sociobiological aspects, the Kurds in Syria are closer to the Kurds in Turkey than being close to the Kurds in Iraq and Iran. The Turkish and Syrian Kurds have historical cultural interactions with each other. Late 2015, when there were clashes in Kobani, between ISIS and PYD, reportedly hundreds of Kurdish young people in Turkey illegally crossed the border and went to defend the PYD in Syria.¹⁵⁷

PYD at the same time is supported by Kurdish political parties in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, especially being very close to Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Gorran (Change) Movement. PUK is simply supporting PYD to protect its hegemony in Sinjar and the areas of Ninewa, which are partly controlled by PKK. At the same time, they share the same nationality and ideological closeness. Moreover, one of the goals of Change Movement in the Kurdistan Region, according to their official platform, is to build a national united confederation. PKK/PYD are ideologically close to Change Movement, and they have the same left-wing ideology. They both, Change Movement and PKK, share the same nationality claim as well. Most importantly, Change Movement has recently issues and misunderstandings with Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) on governmental and administrative issues in the KRG. Change Movement is partly supporting PYD/PKK in Northern Syria and PKK in Sinjar and the areas of Ninewa to decrease KDP's hegemony in the Northwest of Iraq.

All the above mentioned actors are supporters of PYD in Syria. But what we have not talked about yet is Iran. Iran is strongly backing the Syrian Regime of Assad. And PYD

¹⁵⁷ BBC News, Middle East: "Syria war: Who are Jabhat Fateh al-Sham?" August 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36924000>, accessed 14.2.2017.

is reportedly supported by Assad. If we look at the map of Northern Syria, the cantons of Kobani and Afrin were separated from each other since Turkey had controlled Jarabulus. There was no way for PYD to access Afrin unless they had relations with the Syrian Regime and go through the areas of Aleppo. I have personally interviewed many people who have fled from Northern Syria and settled down in the KRG refugee camps that “PYD is strongly depended on the Syrian Regime” which means PYD is strongly backed by Iran too. Despite of that, PKK has good relations with Iran, and it gets military and logistics help from Iran, especially since the start of the second decade of the twenty first century.

These help of Iran and the other states has seriously made Turkey take steps against the rise of PKK in Northern Syria. Turkey has worked hard to force the international community not to help PYD/PKK in Syria as this is a direct threat to the Turkish national security. Turkey has been openly arguing that PYD being an offshoot of PKK is a terrorist group. When the international community did not listen to the Turkish demand, Turkey did not have a choice only to attack for limiting the hegemony of PKK in the region and securing its borders with Syria.

4.5. Different Militia Groups in Syria: Who Supports Whom?

If we look at the whole picture of Syrian crisis, we can see many different military groups from which each is supported by different main actors. Here we would like to introduce four different main groups, their supporters and their antagonists to better understand the whole situation of Syria. We have chosen four main and the most important groups. The first group is YPG which we have already said that it is a military group of PYD/PKK.

The General Commando of YPG is Sipan Hamo. And it is helped by many actors as mentioned above.

The second group from the most important military groups in the Syrian crisis is the main opposition group which is known as the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, it is also known as NC. The group is acting as a transition or interim government of the country. The NC has been founded in 2012 as the second attempt by the international community to create an organization that represents the whole Syrian

people since the Syrian National Council (SNC) failed in this regard.¹⁵⁸ The president of NC is Muhammad Al- Abde who has full executive powers over the organization. The group has an executive branch in Idlib of Syria. And it is backed by the USA and among the regional countries, Egypt is strongly backing the group.

Another group that has a very effective role in the Syrian crisis is Jabhat Fateh Al-Sham or Jabhat Al- Nusra. This group is the most radical group in Syrian crisis. It is a Sunni terrorist organization that aims to establish an “Islamic Emirate” in Syria by overthrowing the Assad Regime. This group was founded in 2011 when Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) sent its members from Iraq to Syria to expand its regional cells. However, the group has officially declared its existence from Al-Qaeda since 2012.¹⁵⁹ The ideology of the group is an Islamic extreme ideology claiming for the establishment of an Islamic State in Syria controlled by their own interpretation of the Islamic Law.

The current leader of the group is Abu Muhammad al- Julani. Many Islamic radical groups are backing Jabhat Al- Nusra, such as, Ahrar al-Sham, Ferliq al-Sham, Aynad al-Sham Front (SRF), Jaysh al-Sunnah, al-Haq Brigade, and Jund al- Aqsa. However, its direct antagonists are the USA and allies, the Syrian Regime, the Syrian revolutionary, and Harakat Hazzm.

The last military group that has an effective role in the Syrian crisis is the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The SDF is a coalition of various armed militias with the largest groups being Kurdish, Arab, Assyrian, Armenian, Turkmen, and Chechen backgrounds. This coalition is the official defense force of the Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria led by PYD (PKK). The coalition was founded in October 2015 when the YPG started to assimilate other opposition forces around the territory of ISIS and the Syrian government. Even though the group is affiliated to PKK/PYD and is

¹⁵⁸ National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces: Official Website, <http://en.etilaf.org/about-us/goals.html>.

¹⁵⁹ BBC News, Middle East: “Syria war: Who are Jabhat Fateh al-Sham?”

strongly opposed by the Turkish government, the USA and the international coalition deal with the group on the ground in fighting against ISIS.¹⁶⁰

As it is exposed above, from these different ideological and militia/terrorist groups, the Syrian crisis has been much more difficult to solve. That is because if we look at the whole picture of the crisis, we can find that each group is backed by a different actor and each actor has its own goals and interests in the country which contradicts the others' goals and interests. The result of the crisis has brought a fatal humanitarian situation in the country. Millions of people including children have lost their lives and many others have fled to other countries.

4.6. Humanitarian Crisis in Syria: Why Turkey is Involving in Syria?

We would like to shortly give some data on the humanitarian crisis in Syria since 2011. According to Violation Documentation Center Syria, the number of people being killed in Syria, from 2011 until March 2017, was 170,480 people, listed and recorded with full names of casualties.¹⁶¹ However, Staffan de Mistura late in 2016 once has said that the total people killed in the crisis are about 400,000 victims. According to data recorded by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), number of total explosions in the Syrian Crisis is 5751 explosions. There have been 10024 fire executions, 34747 shelling, 54490 shooting, 2147 kidnapping- execution, and 30571 warplane shellings. This is all until late of 2016 recorded by the UNOCHA.¹⁶²

In March 2012, about 1000,000 people were in need of humanitarian help in Syria. However, by March 2017, there are about 13,500,000 people in need of humanitarian aid. People who fled the country in March 2012 were 21,959 while this number has increased to 5,020,470 people by March 2017. Moreover, the number of internally displaced people

¹⁶⁰ Lund Aron, "Origins of the Syrian Democratic Forces: A Primer: <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2016/01/22/origins-of-the-syrian-democratic-forces-a-primer>, accessed 14.4.2017.

¹⁶¹ Violation Documentation Center in Syria (VDCS): <http://vdc-sy.net/en/>

¹⁶² UNOCHA data on Syrian Crisis: <http://www.unocha.org/country/syrian-arab-republic/syria-country-profile/syria-country-profile>, accessed 23.4.2017.

(IDP) was 2,000,000 while the number has increased to 6,325,978, according to data from the UNOCHA.¹⁶³

This humanitarian crisis is very important while we are talking about the effect of the crisis on Turkey and Iran relations because Turkey as the closest neighbor of Syria has been very much affected by the crisis economically and politically. The number of Syrian refugees in Turkey has been 2,992,567 people, according to data from the UNHCR last updated in April 27, 2017.¹⁶⁴ This huge number of refugees has left negative socioeconomic effects on Turkey. This is one of the reasons that Turkey has involved in the Syrian crisis and wants to solve the crisis in a way that in the future Turkish political and economic interests will not be under threat in the region.

4.7. Iran's Hegemonic Ambitions in the Region: Why Iran is Involving in Syria?

Iran has a number of ambitions in order to strengthen its hegemony in the region. And Syria is one of the most important countries that have been the center of Iranian strategic ambitions in the region. Iran has recently developed a formidable presence on the ground of Syrian crisis. Iran has simply penetrated the Assad Regime's remaining institutions. For example, it has embedded about 30,000 ground forces in the government controlled areas of western Syria (about 5,000 IRGC, Basij, and Iranian Army elements). Moreover, there have been about 3,000 to 5,000 highly trained Hizbollah fighters brought to Syria from Lebanon. At the same time, there have been around 20,000 Shiite militiamen being returned from Pakistan and Afghanistan to support the Assad's Regime in Syria.¹⁶⁵ Reportedly, up until May 2017, there have been 2,200 members of the Iranian army killed in the recent crisis of Syria and Iraq.¹⁶⁶ This is all despite of the huge logistics help of the Iranian government for Assad's Regime. Iran is saving Assad who has good relations

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ UNHCR Data on Syria: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>, accessed 24.4.2017.

¹⁶⁵ Dehghanpisheh Babak, "Iran recruits Pakistani Shi'ites for combat in Syria." Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-pakistan-iran-idUSKBN0TT22S20151210>, accessed 21.2.2017.

¹⁶⁶ Iddon Poul, "Will Paris atrocity foster stronger French-Kurdish cooperation against ISIS?" Rudaw Analysis: (Nov 2015), <http://www.rudaw.net/english/analysis/15112015>, accessed 16.4.2017.

with the PYD/PKK while Turkey is seeking for regime change in Syria and directly fighting the PYD/PKK in the country. Therefore, both countries are in open contradictions in the Syrian crisis.

Moreover, there are a lot of other aspects showing Iran's interests to increase its hegemony in the region. These aspects can negatively affect the balance of power in the region. Therefore, it is possible that Turkey works for limiting the Iran's increasing hegemony in the region. One of these aspects is the Iran's rigorous enforcement of its nuclear policy that is something Turkey is not happy with. Iraq is another factor that Turkey tries to involve the current Syrian crisis and limiting Iran's increasing power. Since 2003, Iran has almost controlled all the essential institutions of Iraq, and this has decreased the role and effect of Turkey in the country. Therefore, it is neither easy nor is it achievable for Turkey to eliminate Iran's power in Iraq now. Hence, concerning the Syrian crisis, Turkey seems not to repeat the same mistakes it did in Iraq. At least Turkey will do the best for securing its borders and limit the rise of PKK in Northern Syria because the PKK's rise in Northern Syria would directly affect the Turkish national security in the future. There has been ongoing Astana Peace Process for ceasefire in Syria between Turkey, Russia, and Iran. However, the process has not been yet able to end the ongoing crisis in the country. Either way, through peace process or otherwise, the Syrian crisis is a very sensitive issue for Turkey, and Turkey would not leave Syria neither for Iran nor for any other actor playing now inside Syria.

CONCLUSION:

Historically speaking, Turkey and Iran have been two regional rivals in the Middle East even though there have been regional security cooperation pacts taking place in which the two states were essential members. The Saadabad Pact of 1937 and Baghdad Pact in 1955 are two examples from which Turkey and Iran were two very important members, and the Kurdish issue was a very significant aspect of these pacts. Before the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979, Turkey and Iran had similar mechanisms towards dealing with the Kurdish issue. However, the Islamic revolution of Iran changed those mechanisms. Since the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979, Iran has been reluctant to cooperate with Turkey on certain issues, including how to deal with the PKK terrorist group. The emergence of the terrorist group in 1979, and the start of violence there after, between the terrorist group and Turkey is related to a large extent to the ongoing violence and instability which plagued Turkish domestic politics from the period of 1960 until late 1980s.

Within the major changes in the region, such as the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and the Gulf War in the beginnings of 1990s, the PKK members were able to gain more space and establish relations with regional states, including Iran. Thus, Iran has been manipulating PKK and using it against Turkish state from time to time. There are certain evidences throughout this thesis which confirm this manipulative relationship between Iran and PKK, especially during 1990s. We have named 1990s' phase as the spring of relations between Iran and PKK. Here we have presented with proven sources that Iran from time to time has provided logistics, military, and health aid to PKK terrorist members, and Iran has also allowed them to enter its territory and even organize camps inside the country. Meanwhile, Turkey has been aware of that and has repeatedly asked Iran to stop this aid to PKK, but Iran has denied that it helps the terrorist group.

As mentioned above, regional changes have affected the Iran-Turkey relations and Iran-PKK relations as well. The changes during the first decade of this century, such as the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the emergence of PJAK forced both countries to cooperate to secure their borders. This was to a large extent the consequence of the AK Party government's initiatives to improve the bilateral ties. In the first part of the last

decade, a number of security agreements took place between Turkey and Iran for securing their borders. However, these security agreements have not prevented Iran in manipulating PKK. Iran has been using PKK as a tool in its grand strategy for establishing its hegemony in the Middle East.

Since the Arab Spring, Middle Eastern traditional political map has witnessed changes due to the challenge of non-state actors inside particular territories of sovereign states. Among other non-state terrorist groups, PKK in Northern Syria is an example that has been affecting the Syrian crisis. Turkey and Iran are the two sole countries in the region which have remained unaffected states until now by the chaos and havoc of the Arab Spring. As already mentioned above, these two states have been competing against each other in some areas and have been in conflict and rivalry over some regional issues. We assume from this study that the differences between these two states are much bigger than the efforts of cooperation in spite of common threats. In spite of the rivalries between the two states, the nature of the bilateral relations has dictated that both countries cooperate on several occasions. The rise of PKK in the region and especially within the Syrian crisis has directly affected Iranian and Turkish interests in the region. For Turkey, having a particular territory controlled by the PYD/PKK in Northern Syria is a serious concern because it is a danger for the Turkish national security. However, as explained in chapter four, Iran and the PYD/PKK in Syria have been in good relations. The PYD/PKK is now owning a territory and pursuing its own foreign policy. The major events of the last three decades addressed in this thesis created a pattern and circumstance in which it inhabited the development of due mechanism to cooperate and address common threats.

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