

WATER DISPUTE AND KURDISH SEPARATISM IN TURKISH-SYRIAN RELATIONS

ÖZDEN ZEYNEP OKTAV

ABSTRACT

This article aims to understand to what extent the water sharing factor was a decisive or the major one hindering an intact peaceful coexistence of upstream country, Turkey, and its downstream neighbour, Syria, by taking the current relations into consideration. Throughout the 1990s, Turkey tried to solve the security issue with Syria by making some concessions such as releasing 500 cubic meters of water per second. However, Damascus maintained its policy of playing the Kurdish card as a useful instrument of pressure. Toward the end of the 1990s, Syria found itself in total isolation and Damascus adopted a new policy, a rapprochement with its neighbours and coping with the image deterioration. Damascus has currently seemed enthusiastic to cooperate with Turkey for the efficient utilization of water. In a region where the bilateral relations are defined by love-hate characteristics, it has, so far, seemed rather difficult to provide a regional cooperation for an integrated and win-win approach to water issue. However, the growing urgency of increasing the water supply by non-conventional water resources in the Middle East and the necessity to find technological solutions to water scarcity problem will increase ecological, hydrological and economic interdependence.

KEYWORDS

South East Anatolia Project (GAP), Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), Non-Conventional Water Resources, Three-Staged Plan, Shuttle Diplomacy.

The issues of water and terrorism linkage marked Turkish-Syrian relations for a long period of time. The roots of uncooperative relationship between the two countries can be traced back to the 19th century Arab nationalism in Syria. More recently, Turkey accused Syria of backing the Partiya Kerkarani Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers Party-PKK), a Kurdish separatist organization aiming at the establishment of a Kurdish state in southeastern Anatolia, and it did not agree to fix a flow quota of at least 700 cubic meters of water per second (m³/s). Syria, on the other hand, perceiving Turkey as aiming for regional hegemony by aligning with Israel and controlling the water flow of the Euphrates, used the PKK as leverage on Turkey, sheltered the Kurdish guerrillas and its leader Abdullah Öcalan in its territory.

This study tries to explain that the water dispute between Turkey and Syria epitomizes the mutual distrust portraying Turkey's relations with Syria and its Arab neighbours in general. After focusing on the inextricably intertwined security (Kurdish separatism) and water (Turkish utilisation) issues which determined the bilateral relations with Syria throughout the 1990s, it attempts to understand to what extent the water sharing factor was a decisive or the major one hindering an intact peaceful coexistence of upstream country, Turkey, and its downstream neighbour, Syria, by taking the current relations into consideration.

The Main Sources of Friction over Water Issue between Turkey, Syria and Iraq

Many of the present day disputes in the Middle East date back 100 years or more. But the increasing scarcity of renewable water resources and the simultaneous high population growth add new urgency to devise a settlement. The interdependencies among users, rising costs of freshwater, the vulnerability of water quality and aquatic ecosystems to human activities, the failure to treat water as an economic resource, the desire for food security and self-sufficiency,

the importance of water to public health and economic development are the common sources of conflicts over water resources.¹

While neo-Malthusians argue that there is a close relationship between violent interstate conflict and demographic and environmental stress, neo-classical economists argue that an abundance of natural resources, rather than the scarcity, is more likely to produce armed conflict because resource abundance encourages over-reliance on exports of minimally processed natural resources and it makes countries vulnerable to declining terms of trade and the highly volatile nature of international commodities markets.² Neo-Malthusian arguments often apply much more to renewable resources such as water while the neo-classical economists apply more to non-renewable mineral resources such as natural gas and oil. The above-mentioned arguments of neo-Malthusians and neo-classical economists shed further light on the existing resource conflict between Turkey's having renewable resource and Syria's having non-renewable mineral resource.

The economic marginalization and the demographic shifts led to increasing scarcity of renewable water resources in countries like Syria, which lacks the institutions and the technological, social and political ingenuity to adapt. 'In the early 1970s, Syria and Turkey began to harness the waters of the Euphrates by large scale irrigation and hydroelectric power generation projects. The realization of these projects also implied that Turkey, Iraq and Syria should use the amount of water largely exceeding the river's supply. In such a context, the dams are perceived as threats, not as means to store water.'³ Turkey's construction of the giant GAP project,⁴ which

¹Kenneth D. Fredrick, 'Water as a Source of International Conflict', *Resources For the Future*, Spring 1996 in http://www.rff.org/resources_articles/files/waterwar.htm

²Colin Kahl, 'Demographic Change, Natural Resources and Violence the Current Debate', *Journal of International Affairs*, Fall 2002, Vol. 56, No. 27, p. 2 in http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/899/222/34215502w2/purl=rc1_ITOF_0_A94337339&dyn=3!xrn_3_0_A9433....

³Serdar Güner, 'The Turkish-Syrian War of Attrition The Water Dispute,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, January-March 1997, Vol. 20, Issue1, p. 107.

consists not only of water resources development but also of investments in all related sectors such as agriculture, energy, transportation, health care, education, urban and rural infrastructure in an integrated manner,⁵ was, therefore, perceived as Turkey's reluctance to share waters of the Euphrates with its Arab neighbours and its enthusiasm to utilize it arbitrarily.

However, given the high rate of seasonal fluctuation of the Euphrates, water storage is the paramount task in the basin. This is because while the construction of the Keban Dam, which has a very positive impact over the water storage facilities of Syria and Iraq by ensuring the regulation of approximately 70% of the waters of the Euphrates,⁶ was welcomed, the initiation of the construction preparations of the Atatürk Dam in 1980 set off alarm bells in Syria and Iraq because it marked a significant transition from a pure hydroelectric use of water to water usage for irrigation purposes, which typically constitutes 80% of total water use, well above industrial and household use of water⁷. In addition to Syria's complain about the pollution that the GAP will have on the water of the Euphrates, that the eventual flow of Euphrates water will go down to 300 cubic meters per second when the GAP is fully in operation is another concern of Syrian administration.⁸ From Turkey's

⁴The project envisages the construction of 22 dams and 19 hydro-power plants on the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers. When completed, the project is expected to irrigate 1.7 million hectares of land and to generate 27 billion KWh of hydroelectric energy annually.', GAP İdaresi 1997 Yılı Faaliyet Raporu, Ankara: GAP Bölge Kalkınma İdaresi Başkanlığı, pp. 16-19 in Yönet Can Tezel, 'The Water Issue in Turkey's Relations With Syria', September 1999, unpublished dissertation.

⁵Ali Çarkoğlu and Mine Eder, 'Domestic Concerns and the Water Conflict over the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1, January 2001, p. 41.

⁶Özden Bilen, *Ortadoğu Su Sorunları ve Türkiye*, TESAV Yayınları, Ankara, 1996, p.111.

⁷Ali Çarkoğlu and Mine Eder, 'Domestic Concerns and the Water Conflict over the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1, January 2001, p.57.

⁸Serdar Güner, 'Signalling in the Turkish-Syrian Water Dispute', *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Fall 1998, p. 188 in Yönet Can Tezel, 'The Water Issue in Turkey's Relations With Syria', September 1999, unpublished dissertation , p.54.

perspective, however, the most important function of the dams constructed on the Euphrates is to regulate the flow of the water. Yet, their contribution is not only confined to requirements of Turkey but to those of the neighbouring countries, namely Syria and Iraq. The velocity of the Euphrates may fall as low as 100 cubic meters per second during the summer while it could reach maximum of 700 cubic meters when the spring snows melt. The existence of the dams enables Turkey to provide a regular flow of 500 cubic meters to its neighbours throughout the year. Obviously the main beneficiaries of this have been Syria and Iraq.

Another reason for the controversy was the disagreement on the amount and degree of irrigable land. The land classification systems of both Syria and Iraq differ widely from those used in Turkey. The fundamental source of water problem is that the river basin cannot accommodate all demands that range from the use of water for hydroelectric and irrigation purposes to the use of water for regional development purposes. 'It is important to note that Syria's and Iraq's protests over the use of the Euphrates basin have largely emerged from projected water needs. Not all of the planned irrigation, however, has materialized. In case of the Tabqa dam, for instance, Syria planned irrigating 640.000 hectares of land but has so far irrigated approximately 240.000 hectares mainly because of salinization and poor quality of land.'⁹

Neo-classical economists argue that critical renewable resources such as arable land and fresh water often lack cheap substitutes or easy technological fixes, leaving conservation as the major adaptation mechanism and they argue that the economic policies and poverty not only exacerbate environmental pressures but also tend to undermine the capacity of individuals and governments to make timely and expensive investments in conservation.¹⁰ Indeed,

⁹Ali Çarkoğlu and Mine Eder, 'Domestic Concerns and the Water Conflict over the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1, January 2001, p. 57.

¹⁰Colin Kahl, 'Demographic Change, Natural Resources and Violence the Current Debate', *Journal of International Affairs*, Fall 2002, Vol. 56, No.27 in http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/ifomark/899/222/34215502w2/purl=rcl_ITOF_0_A94337339&dyn=3!xrn_3_0_A9433....

primitive agricultural techniques stemming from Syria's stagnant economy or the use of water to irrigate non-or low-productive lands which will result in the emergence of a water requirement, higher than the river's average annual flow of water 31.58bn m³,¹¹ have been the main points about which Ankara has complained.¹²

In addition, Turkey, noting that it has single-handedly undertaken costly water projects, which have greatly benefited both downstream states and protected the entire ecosystem, has objected to the Syrian and Iraqi demands concerning the arbitrary determination of the quantity of water needed for irrigation. Instead, Ankara proposed the 'Three Staged Plan'¹³ for the equitable and optimum allocation of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers based on the systematic assessment of water needs for irrigation of all parties during the fifth meeting of Joint Technical Committee in 1984.¹⁴ The above-mentioned plan, which considered the water transfer opportunity from the Tigris to the Euphrates, was opposed by Iraq, which based its argument on its 'ancestral rights' over the Tigris.¹⁵ Syria also opposed the 'Three Staged Plan' and refused to negotiate the Orontes basin together with the Euphrates-Tigris basin. In other words, the proposal in the plan to consider the Euphrates-Tigris basin as a single unit, to determine the common use of the waters by all three countries

¹¹'Water Issues Between Turkey, Syria and Iraq', *Perceptions Journal of International Affairs*, June-August 1996, Vol. 1, No. 2, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupa/percept/i2/12-6.htm> -

¹²Iraq and Syria, for example, currently demand a total of 148 percent of the flow capacity of the Euphrates and 111 percent of the Tigris. In short, the demands of Iraq and Syria tacitly assume that Turkey should release all the flow of the river without utilizing any of it.', *Iraq Report*, 'Tigris-Euphrates Issue Resurfaces', June 4, 1999, volume 2, number 22.

¹³For details of the Three-Staged Plan see 'Water Issues Between Turkey, Syria and Iraq', A Study of Turkish Foreign Ministry Affairs, *Perceptions*, Vol. 1, No. 2, June-August 1996, pp. 107-112.

¹⁴'The Joint Technical Committee, which was foreseen as a forum to discuss regional water matters, was set up with a protocol of the Joint Economic Committee at meetings held between Turkey and Iraq in 1980. Syria joined this mechanism in 1983', Water Issues Between Turkey, Syria and Iraq', *Perceptions Journal of International Affairs*, June-August 1996, Vol. 1, No. 2, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupa/percept/i2/12-6.htm>

¹⁵*Turkish Daily News*, February 6, 1996 in [wysiwyg://1/http://www.hri.org/news/agencies/trkn/96-02-06.trkn.html](http://www.hri.org/news/agencies/trkn/96-02-06.trkn.html)

and the suggestion that high technologies be applied to minimise the requirements for agriculture were seen by Iraq and Syria as an infringement in their sovereignty.

Another source of friction which makes reaching a consensus difficult is that three sides have not even been able to agree on the very definition of the river system. Turkey claimed the Euphrates and Tigris as 'transboundary' rivers, whereas Syria and Iraq considered them to be international. 'Adopting the legal doctrine of *absolute territorial sovereignty*, Turkish sources argued that the Euphrates and Tigris both originate on Turkish soil and are Turkish rivers while they flow over Turkish territory, concluding that Turkey is not obliged to share its waters with its neighbours.'¹⁶ The then Turkish President, Süleyman Demirel's words 'Turkey's resources are Turkey's. The oil resources are theirs (Arabs'). We do not say we share their oil resources; and they cannot say they share our water resources'¹⁷ brought up the question of the legal status of water and the legitimacy of drawing a parallel between the legal status of oil and water. Syria adhered to the doctrine of *limited territorial sovereignty*¹⁸ and suggested that the Euphrates must be shared according to a formula computed by the riparians' declarations of water demands and the river's capacity.¹⁹ Iraq held to the doctrine of *absolute territorial integrity*, insisting on its ancient or prior rights of use of water from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers.²⁰

In addition to the Turkish claims that the Euphrates and Tigris rivers must be considered together as a single transboundary water

¹⁶Mustafa Dolatyar & Tim S. Gray, *Water Politics in the Middle East*, New York St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 147.

¹⁷Mohammed Ali Kazem and Khalil Osman, 'Conflicting Claims to Euphrate Water Muddy Syrian-Turkish Relations' in <http://www.muslimmedia.com.archives/world98/euphrate.htm>

¹⁸Mustafa Dolatyar & Tim S. Gray, *Water Politics in the Middle East*, New York St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 148.

¹⁹Serdar Güner, 'The Turkish-Syrian War of Attrition: The Water Dispute', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, January-March 1997, Vol. 20, Issue 1, p. 105.

²⁰Nurit Kiliot, *Water Resources and Conflict in the Middle East*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994 in Mustafa Dolatyar & Tim S. Gray, *Water Politics in the Middle East*, New York St. Martin's Press, 2000, p.148.

course system, not as international rivers, Ankara declared that Turkey would agree to share transboundary waters if they included the river Orontes, which flows through Lebanon, Syria and Southern Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea, as well as the Tigris river. However, Turkey's reference to the Orontes brings in the thorny issue of its historical territorial dispute with Syria over Hatay province.²¹ 'If a general water agreement were to cover the Orontes, both the Syrians and the Turks think that it would imply the recognition of Hatay as Turkish. While Syria has regularly referred to this disputed territory as the 'Arab İskenderun' and thus insists on the Arab character of its waters.'²²

The Turkish officials argue that 'if comparison is made between the utilisation of the Orontes and the Euphrates, there is justified cause for Turkey to complain about how the water of the Orontes is completely consumed by Syria and Lebanon, while Turkey releases 500cm/s of water even when the velocity of the Euphrates falls to 100 cm/s.'²³

²¹'Like most borderlands, the Sanjak of Alexandretta (Hatay) has been long ethnically mixed, Arab and Turkish, with Armenians as well . At the end of World War I, France won the inclusion of the Sanjak of Alexandretta in its League of Nations Mandate over Syria-Lebanon. French policy was to maintain separate administrations for ethnic and religious with a geographic identity. In the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, Turkey had renounced any claim to its former territories. But in 1936, when Syria was slated for independence under the mandate, Turkey insisted that a majority of its population were Turks, and that it should revert to the Turkish Republic. In June 1939, with European war imminent, France signed an agreement and separately ceded Hatay to Turkey. Syria never recognized the incorporation of Hatay into Turkey, Syrian maps frequently show the entire region as part of Syria', *The Estimate*, 'Syria and Turkey: Many Roots to the Recent Quarrel, October 23, 1998 in file://A:\Syria%20Turkey%20Many%20Roots%20to%20the%20Recent%20

²²Hasan Chalabi and Tarek Majzoub, 'Turkey, the waters of the Euphrates and Public International Law', J.A. Allan et al. (eds), *Water in the Middle East: Legal, Political and Commercial Implications*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, pp. 189- 238 in Dolatyar & Gray, p.149.

²³John Bulloch and Adel Darwish, *Water Wars: Coming Conflicts in the Middle East*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1993, p.69.

Turkey notes that there are few agreements concerning the sharing of water from the 215 river systems upon which most countries reach a consensus and asserts that the May 1977 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses²⁴ creates an obvious inequality and the convention grants close to veto rights to downstream countries over the planned measures to be taken by the upstream countries and it ignores the indisputable principle of the sovereignty of concerned states over the parts of the watercourses situated in their territory. The crux of the matter is that the uniqueness of each water dispute makes harder to reach general principles. For example, some principles on sharing international waters such as 'equitable and reasonable utilisation and participation' can be easily interpreted by the parties to their own advantage.

The Two Intertwined Issues: the Kurdish Separatism and the Water Sharing

The controversy over the legal status of the Euphrates and Tigris led to the Syrian and Iraqi initiatives for a financial campaign against the upstream Turkish projects.²⁵ They became successful in getting support of the Arab League members, the oil-rich Arab countries and other international lending institutions in order not to finance the GAP Project. From Arabs' perspective, with the GAP Project, Turkey would emerge as the main source of food in the region, worst of all, Turkey, whose hand is on the tap, was holding Democles' sword over their heads. The Arabs' refusal of Turkey's gesture to bring drinking water from Anatolia down to the Arab

²⁴*Iraq Report*, 'Tigris-Euphrates Issue Resurfaces', June 4, 1999, Vol. 2, Number 22. 'Out of the 133 countries that voted on the 'Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Water Courses in the UN, for instance 103 voted yes, 3 voted no (Turkey, China and Brundi) and 27 were absent and the document was non-binding.', Çarkoğlu, pp.59.

²⁵'When Syria protested against the Karakaya Dam project in Turkey, the World Bank dismissed its objections on the ground that the Dam was a hydro-power project which would have regulated but not reduced the river's flow.', Mustafa Dolatyar & Tim S. Gray, *Water Politics in the Middle East*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 2000, p, 153.

peninsula through a pipeline²⁶ to help the water poor countries depicts best the above-mentioned mutual distrust between Turkey and the Arabs. This proposal of Turkey was perceived as Turkey's enthusiasm to use water as a weapon. 'The threefold fear was that the project would enhance Turkey's regional importance at the expense of the Arabs; threaten Arab national security by providing it with a strategic asset, and finally, if Israel were to be included, it would bring about the collusion of these two against the Arabs.'²⁷ From Syria's viewpoint, Turkey's proposal to pipe the water of Shihan and Jihan, being entirely within Turkish territory, at a time when it refrained from releasing waters of Euphrates and Tigris, was unacceptable. Moreover, the questions such as what price would Turkey charge for this water and what was to keep it from raising the price to astronomical levels after Syrians became dependent upon this source²⁸ hindered the Syrian officials to accept Turkey's above-mentioned proposal.

The perceptions of Syria or the Arabs in general regarding the strategic threat posed by Turkey were intensified by several major regional and international developments. In their view, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the establishment of six Muslim states in Central Asia were the new opportunities encouraging the rulers of Turkey to overtake a leading role in the new world order during the 1990s. Turkey's close alliance with the United States

²⁶'Turkey's proposal of a "peace pipeline" in 1988 was to channel fresh water from the Jihan (Ceyhan) and Shihan (Seyhan) rivers in southern Turkey through Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia to the Gulf. Two massive pipelines were to supply water to these countries one to Jordanian and Syrian cities and the other to Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. But they objected to this plan on the pretext that it was cost-ineffective.' Murhaf Jouejati, 'Water Politics As High Politics the Case of Turkey and Syria', Henry J. Barkey, (ed), *Reluctant Neighbour: Turkey's Role in the Middle East*, Washington D.C.: US Institute of Peace Press, 1996, p. 143 and see Konuralp Pamukçu, 'Water-Related Co-operation Between Turkey and Israel', *Turkish Studies Institute* in <http://tsi.idc.ac.il/pamukcu.html>

²⁷Ofra Bengio and Gencer Özcan, 'Old Grievances, New Fears: Arab Perceptions of Turkey and Its Alignment with Israel', *Middle Eastern Studies*, p. 64.

²⁸Erol Manisalı, 'Water and Turkish – Middle East Relations', *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 1996, Vol. 6, Issues 1-2, p. 166.

during the Gulf War and the dramatic change in Turkey's policy of balancing Arabs with Israel with the signing of the Military Training Cooperation Agreement of February 1996,²⁹ which came as a shock among the Arabs, strengthened their contention that Turkey could not be a friend of some Arabs and the enemy of others.³⁰ Therefore, the Arabs felt the necessity of adopting a unified stance against Turkey. They backed Syria and Iraq, which urged foreign contractors not to cooperate with Turkey on the GAP project, and warned that otherwise they would be shut out of future projects in Iraq and Syria and perhaps in other Arab countries. Turkey, thus, has had to bear the huge cost of the GAP from its own hard-pressed budget.³¹

Although the GAP Project has adversely affected the national economy of Turkey and fuelled inflation of more than 100%, Turkish leaders portrayed the GAP as a matter of national pride and the governing parties regardless of their ideology have consistently supported this giant project. As Kut and Turan suggests, 'Water

²⁹'The Military Training Cooperation Agreement' of February 1996 included among others an exchange of military information, experience and personnel; access to each other's airspace for the training of military warplanes and joint training activities ; 'Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement' of August 1996 provided the framework for the two 'upgrading deals' signed in 1997 and 1998 for the modernization of Turkish F-4s and F-5s., Gencer Özcan and Ofra Bengio, 'The Decade of the Military in Turkey: The Case of the Alignment With Israel in the 1990s', *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, Spring 2001, Vol. 7, nos. 1 and 2, p. 22.

³⁰Dunya al-'Arab, no. 63 (February 1990) p.12; see also al-Shahid (April 1990) in Ofra Bengio and Gencer Özcan, 'Old Grievances, New Fears: Arab Perceptions of Turkey and Its Alignment with Israel', *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 37, No. 2, April 2001.

³¹'For example, Damascus held official contacts with Britain and other European countries over news reports that European private and governmental institutions intended to participate in financing a new Turkish dam (Elazığ / Elzoug dam) at a cost of US \$ 1.6 billion on the Tigris, after the World Bank refused to take part in its financing because the said dam 'violates the UN laws concerning international waters in under disputed territories'. *ArabicNews.com*, 'Damascus Seeks to Prevent Europe From Financing US \$ 1.6 Billion Turkish Dam', December 3, 1999 in <http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/990312/1999031216.html> Mustafa Dolatyar and Tim S. Gray, *Water Politics in the Middle East*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 2000, p, 153.

disputes may be handy to politicians in personifying real or perceived outside threats in the domestic context, and in this way serve to unite the society against 'foreign enemies' and mobilise support for the government'³². In a way, the GAP project, which has emerged as a project associated with the vision of a 'great Turkey' during the 1980s, became an impetus for the patronage policies in Turkey.

In addition, the fact that the GAP project has turned out to be a giant regional development programme which came at a time when the Kurdish issue gained momentum, made it difficult for the Turkish politicians to cut or limit funding overall project. They believed that the project would eventually resolve the socio-economic backwardness and unequal distribution of land, which have negative implications for the Kurdish issue. Theoretically speaking, the GAP Project, which was constructed in Kurdish populated territories, where 'people despise the state, which denied their identity, culture and language for many years',³³ would provide a consensus between the Kurds and the Turkish state.

Syria, being aware that it has a potentially strong security card to play, waged an undeclared war against Turkey and assisted the Kurdish separatists as leverage to induce her to solve the water problem. Whenever Syria felt vulnerable to future cut-offs and reductions of water, it did not avoid using the Kurdish separatism card.

For example, Hafez el Asad's presence in the ceremony of the PKK in Bekaa Valley soon after the announcement of Turkey's decision to interrupt the flow of water for one month during the impounding of the Atatürk Dam was a message to Ankara that Syria had many pressure cards vis-à-vis Turkey.³⁴ The building and completion of the Atatürk Dam was seen as a significant threat to future agricultural plans of Syria and Iraq so as to build dominance

³²Gün Kut and İter Turan, 'Political-Ideological Constraints on Intra-Basin Cooperation on Transboundary Waters', *Natural Forces Forum*, vol. 21 (1997), p. 140 in Çarkoğlu, p. 65

³³Mustafa Dolatyar & Tim S. Gray, *Water Politics in the Middle East*, New York St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 154.

³⁴Neşet Akmandor, Hüseyin Pazarcı and Hasan Köni, *Ortadoğu Ülkelerinde Su Sorunu*, Ankara, Tesav Yayınları, 1994, pp. 62-63.

over Iraq and Syria, in other words, it was a clear example of 'water imperialism.'³⁵

The Kurdish separatism was the biggest domestic security problem of Turkey during the 1990s, tying up the Turkish army in the region and imposing much more pressure on the already drained national budget and costing to the lives of 30.000 people who died in the fight.³⁶ Having realised what its downstream neighbour could do to affect the situation inside Turkey by giving support for the Kurdish rebels, Ankara felt the necessity of solving the problem by means of negotiations.

During an official visit to Ankara, the Syrian prime minister, for the first time, linked the water and the security issues publicly and told that 'they would sign the security protocol only if Turkey entered into a formal water agreement.'³⁷ In June 1987, while visiting Damascus, the late President Turgut Özal signed a temporary Protocol of Economic Co-operation with Syria which stipulated that 500 cubic meters of water per second would flow to Syria until both countries reached a final solution. Furthermore, in case of a decrease in water flow per month, Turkey would compensate the same amount of water from its reservoirs.³⁸

³⁵Ali Çarkoğlu and Mine Eder, 'Domestic Concerns and the Water Conflict over the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1, January 2001, p. 57.

³⁶'Turkey's fight against the Kurdish separatism which had come to high cost: 30.000 military and civilian casualties and \$86 billion which approximated Turkey's entire external debt', Statement by Ambassador Uluç Özülker, deputy under secretary of state in charge of bilateral political relations in the Turkish Foreign Affairs Ministry. See *Hürriyet*, October 13, 1998 in Mahmut Bali Aykan, 'The Turkish-Syrian Crisis of October 1998: A Turkish View', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 6, Number 4, p. 175.

³⁷John Bulloch and Adel Darwish, *Water Wars: Coming Conflicts in the Middle East*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1993, p.66 in Dolatyar & Gray, p.155.

³⁸For the concerned articles of the protocol see: 'The Protocol of Economic Co-operation Between Turkish Republic and Syria', *Resmi Gazete (Official Newspaper)*, December 10, 1987, pp. 2-5.

This article of the 1987 protocol was strongly criticized in Turkey on the grounds that it was clashing with Turkey's realities. For example, in the proceeding years, the President Süleyman Demirel stated that Turkey's decision to release 500 m3 cubic meters of water was a haphazard decision.³⁹ The 1987 protocol also fell short of Syria's intended goal, which is a binding agreement rather than a unilateral Turkish pledge. However, although its security provisions were general in character and made no mention of the PKK, it was the first protocol which openly revealed the relation between the water question and the PKK's separatism.⁴⁰ The signing of the protocols of Security Co-operation and Economic Co-operation on the same day also revealed the relation between the PKK and the water issue very openly.⁴¹

The 1987 Protocol did not deter Syria from following its traditional policy of supporting the PKK's separatism. Soon after the above mentioned protocol, Öcalan was given the opportunity of meeting with the Soviet diplomats in Damascus.⁴² Ankara allegedly hinted at a cut in the flow of Euphrates water to Syria. In October 1989, Syrian MIGs on a "training mission" shot down a Turkish survey plane well within Turkey's borders. Five people were killed in the incident, which was reportedly linked to Syrian-Turkish tensions over water.⁴³

The dismemberment of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the collapse of communism prompted Syria to support the allied powers during the Gulf War. Owing to this cooperative atmosphere, Syria and Turkey signed another protocol of security in April 1992, during

³⁹Milliyet, February 3, 1994, in Özlem Tür, 'Türkiye,-Suriye İlişkileri Su Sorunu', Meliha Benli Altunışık (der), *Türkiye ve Ortadoğu Tarih Kimlik Güvenlik*, İstanbul, Boyut Yayınları, 1999, p. 110.

⁴⁰İbrahim Mazlum, 'Türkiye ve Sınırşan Suların Güvenlik Boyutu', Gencer Özcan, Şule Kut (eds), *Türkiye'nin Ulusal Güvenlik ve Dış Politika Gündeminde Doksanlı Yıllar En Uzun On Yıl*, İstanbul, Boyut Yayınları, 1998, p. 392.

⁴¹Gün Kut, 'Burning Waters: The Hydropolitics of the Euphrates and Tigris', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 9, Fall, 1993, pp. 8-9.

⁴²İsmet G. İmset, *PKK: Ayrılıkçı Şiddetin 20 Yılı (1973-1992)*, Ankara, Turkish Daily News Yayınları, 1993, p.227.

⁴³Joyce R. Starr, 'Water Wars', *Foreign Policy*, no:82, Spring 1991, p.31.

which both countries agreed on such matters as the relocation of the boundary stones, border trade, struggle with cattle plague, the telephone interconnection, prevention of terrorism, extradition of the apprehended persons and prevention of drug trafficking.⁴⁴ However, it did not suffice to prevent Damascus from encouraging the separatist activities of the PKK against Turkey although the Prime Minister Demirel, during his visit to Damascus in January 19-20, 1993, was assured that Syria's extending support for terrorism was out of question.⁴⁵

The signing of the Joint Memorandum on the Security Issues in November 1993⁴⁶ epitomized the duality and ambivalence prevailing in Syria's policies towards Turkey. While Syria, for the first time, declared that the PKK was a terrorist organization during the above-mentioned agreement, it ignored the PKK guerrillas' infiltration and assaults to Hatay via Syrian territories.⁴⁷ Damascus also put pressure on Turkey by bringing the issue into the international sphere, the six GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Katar, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, for example, it issued the Damascus Declaration, which demanded a "just agreement" for distributing the Euphrates waters and strongly criticized Ankara's intention to build Birecik dam on the Turkish-Syrian border, as part of the GAP project in December 1995.⁴⁸ This protest of the six GCC countries made the finalization of a credit agreement for the Birecik dam on the Euphrates river difficult and it has become a new trouble spot between Turkey and Syria.⁴⁹

Turkey, who tried to explain that the construction of the Birecik dam was planned to ensure more regular flow to downstream

⁴⁴İsmail Soysal, 'Turkish-Syrian Relations (1946-1999)', *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies Annual 1998-1999* İstanbul, ISIS, 1998, p.109.

⁴⁵Mazlum, 'En Uzun On Yıl....', p. 393.

⁴⁶For the text of the protocol see Fahir Alaçam, 'The Turkish-Syrian Relations', *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies Annual 1994—1995*, İstanbul, OBIV, 1996, p.16.

⁴⁷*YeniYüzyıl*, 'Suriye'ye Yine Uyarı', November 27, 1995.

⁴⁸*Hürriyet*, December 30, 1995.

⁴⁹Nazlan Ertan, 'Birecik Dam: New Trouble Spot Between Turkey and Syria', *Turkish Daily News*, December 21, 1995, <http://b-info.com/Turkey/news/95-12/dec21.tdn>

countries by regulating the flow of the water, did her best to attain an agreement over the water issue on scientific and technical basis rather than an ideological and political one. Turkey would, thus, secure financing from the World Bank and other international lenders and donors. Towards the end of the 1990s, however, Ankara realized that Damascus, feeling militarily vulnerable against Turkey, was not willing to give in on the thorny issue of the PKK.

Syrian administration, for example, did not avoid to underpin the PKK's allegation that it was a political organization. Öcalan was allowed to have contacts with high-ranking German political and intelligence officials in Damascus. Turkey's concerns about the PKK's efforts to be recognized as a political organization, especially by the European Union countries, were exacerbated by further developments, such as the 1998 meeting of the Kurdish parliament in exile in Italy. This meeting came at a time when Turkey felt excluded from the EU after the rejection of Ankara's application for full membership during the Luxembourg summit in December 1997. In addition, the signing of the US-brokered agreement between Masud Barzani and Jalal Talabani in September 1998 in Washington, which greatly revived the prospects of an independent Kurdish state also triggered Ankara to change its policy of appeasement towards Syria.⁵⁰ Ankara, thus, took the decision to follow the policy of 'crisis management'⁵¹ which culminated with the October crisis.

During the 1998 October crisis, added to strong verbal warnings of Turkish military chief of staff Kıvrıkoğlu and the diplomatic initiatives of President Demirel and of the Foreign minister Cem, such as making shuttle diplomacy with the presidents of the Arab countries and sending letters to the foreign ministers, Turkey massed 10.000 troops near the border and the Turkish jets made low altitude flights over the Syrian border. Whether out of fear

⁵⁰Yüksel Sezgin, 'The October 1998 Crisis in Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Prospect Theory Approach', *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Autumn 2002, p.62.

⁵¹' This policy was called ' a flexible response' strategy that would gradually escalate the crisis so long as Syria declined to respond to Turkey's demands.', *Milliyet*, October 19, 1998 and *Cumhuriyet*, October 8, 1998 in Mahmut Bali Aykan, 'The Turkish-Syrian Crisis of October 1998: A Turkish View', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 6, Number 4, p. 177.

of Turkey alone or out of fear of a two-front war with Turkey and Israel, Assad clearly did not want to test Turkish resolve. For the first time Damascus consented to negotiate security question without reaching a political compromise on water problem. Although the Adana agreement, signed after the October crisis, whose main elements could be found in agreements signed in 1987, 1992 and 1993 created a sense of *dé ja vu*, it, unlike the others, resulted in the expulsion of Öcalan and brought about a constructive rapprochement between the two countries.

The October crisis and the expulsion of Öcalan was, at the same time, a manifestation of Turkey's regional weight. In other words, Turkey needed a crisis which would reflect its emergence as an assertive and self-confident power in the region and would reunite the Turkish people around a national cause. Indeed, on the domestic front, the rising tide of Kurdish separatism and the Islamic fundamentalism during the 1990s led to Turkish-Kurdish and secular-Islamist cleavage. The downfall of the Islamist coalition government by the military decree in 1997 and the insufficiency of the political cadres to find practical solutions to the problems of Turkey led to an increase in Turkish military's role in securing the secular and the unitarian structure of Turkey. Not surprisingly, it reinforced the perceptions that Turkey did not have a fully-fledged democracy yet.

Another point worth mentioning is that the Syrian escalation of the PKK's war by proxy against Turkey urged Ankara to manifest its regional weight toward the end of the 1990s. Put bluntly, Ankara had twofold reason for its motivation to instigate the October 1998 crisis: first of all, Turkey needed a crisis which would reflect its emergence as an assertive and self-confident power in the region so as to display that the security issue with Syria, which became acute during the 1990s, came to an end. Second, on the domestic front, the rising tide of Kurdish separatism and the Islamic fundamentalism during the 1990s led to Turkish-Kurdish and secular-Islamist cleavage. Therefore, Ankara needed a crisis; a national cause around which the Turkish people would reunite so as to secure the secular and the unitarian structure of Turkey

The Reasons for Current Rapprochement with Syria

Within a very short period of time, full rapprochement was well under way. Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer's visit to Hafiz al-Assad's funeral in June 2000; and in November of that year, Vice President Abd al-Khaddam's visit to Ankara with a letter pledging to 'turn over a new leaf' in bilateral relations indicated a dramatic shift in the relations between the respective countries. The Turkish-Syrian relations have further improved. Land mines along the border have been cleared, and border restrictions were eased in February 2002. Bilateral trade has risen from almost nothing in 1998 to \$724 million in 2001, the two countries signed a protocol foreseeing closer ties in trade, tourism and energy.⁵² The security contacts that have taken place regularly since 1998 culminated with the signing of a military training agreement during Syrian chief of staff Gen. Al-Turkomani's visit to Turkey.⁵³

The reasons for this current rapprochement are related to several regional and international developments as well as to the volatility of the balance of powers and to the changing regional countries' security perceptions.

First of all, the collapse of the Soviet Union, which deprived Syria of having Soviet political backing and economic aid, posed a grave domestic challenge and urged the regime to recognize the necessity of acting to improve the standard of living and welfare of the individual, and to lessen social and economic hardship. In order to achieve this goal and to curb any demand for change within the political system, President Hafez al Asad felt the necessity of opening the doors of Syria to the world beyond its borders. This decision was coupled with the desire to foster economic ties with the West and

⁵²*CNN.com* 'Turkey and Syria Sign Protocol As Relations Warm', June 22, 2001 in <http://www.printthis/clickmap=printthis&expire=07%2F2001&uri=http%3A%2Fwww>

⁵³Malik Müfti, 'Turkish-Syrian Rapprochement: Causes and Consequences', *PolicyWatch*, June 21, 2002, number 630 in <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/policywatch/policywatch2002/630.htm>

receive economic aid.⁵⁴ In parallel with these developments, Asad did his best to provide Syria's removal from the list of countries recognised as 'state sponsor of terrorism'. He did not insist on the PKK card and participated in the US-driven Middle East peace negotiations in 2000.⁵⁵

Asad's health problems also compelled him to launch the rapprochement with Syria's neighbours towards the end of his life to ease his son Bashar's inheritance.⁵⁶

More recently, after Bush's declaration that 'any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime', Washington's efforts to encourage Syrian moderation in Arab-Israeli diplomacy have come to an end. Washington's growing intimidating rhetoric⁵⁷ towards Syria because of Damascus's insistence on the policy of supporting anti-Israel terrorist groups has been one of the major reasons for Syria's strengthening its relations with Turkey. In other words, pressured by Israel and a suspicious United States, Syria has taken steps to build a loose-knit regional alliance by turning its immediate neighbors from potential enemies into useful allies. As is known, the fact that the Washington-led drive to unseat Iraqi president Saddam Hussein would damage both countries' (Syria and Turkey) commercial links

⁵⁴For further information, see Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy Syria in Transition*, London, Hurst and Company, 2000, pp. 181- 182.

⁵⁵These negotiations failed because of Assad's insistence on gaining control over water sources in the Golan Heights', Paul Michael Wihbey and Ilan Berman, 'The Geopolitics of Water', *Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies Research Papers in Strategy*, No. 10, September 2000 in <http://www.israeleconomy.org/strat10/strat10.htm>

⁵⁶Yüksel Sezgin, 'The October 1998 Crisis in Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Prospect Theory Approach', *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Autumn 2002, p. 64.

⁵⁷Bush directly called on Syria to 'choose the right side in the war on terror by closing terrorist camps and expelling terrorist organizations.' Matthew Levitt, 'Syrian Sponsorship of Global Terrorism: The Need For Accountability', *Policy Watch*, September 19, 2002 in <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/policywatch/policywatch2002/660.htm>

with Iraq and would also led to the two countries' leaving aside all the existing issues and promoting the bilateral relations.⁵⁸

One explanation of the current rapprochement is the fear that the US invasion of Iraq will create regional instability by inciting Kurds in Turkey and possibly even in Syria to rebel to form a new nation with the Iraqi Kurds. From Ankara's perspective, the newly emerged American policy of forcibly changing the regimes as well as the twentieth century Arab political order based on authoritarianism and chauvinism which would lead to the emergence of more inclusive and representative order, including new popular forces (ethnic, sectarian, ideological) consists of the main threat to Turkey's traditional policy of preserving the regional status-quo. Such changes, for example, would have even more profound implications for Turkey than the Syrian crisis of 1998.⁵⁹

Turkey has been extremely uneasy about Washington's current policies in northern Iraq, which will possibly lead to the foundation of a Kurdish state in the region. Therefore, the diplomatic initiatives among Turkey, Iran and Syria, despite Turkey's efforts not to give the impression of forming an alliance with the above-mentioned countries, signal, in a way, that the objection to the assertive policies of Washington in the Middle East has a gluing effect for the three countries.⁶⁰ The signing of the two landmark military cooperation

⁵⁸What was keeping the Syrian economy afloat was its oil industry, especially an influx of about 200.000 barrels of oil a day from Iraq despite UN sanctions. Syria got the oil in a barter arrangement in return for textiles, television sets and other goods that it would be hard-pressed to sell elsewhere. Neil MacFarquhar, 'Hafez Assad's Legacy Overshadows New Goals For Syria's Cabinet', *International Herald Tribune*, January 22, 2002 in <http://www.int.com/articles/45559.html>

⁵⁹Malik Müfti, 'Turkish-Syrian Rapprochement: Causes and Consequences', *PolicyWatch*, June 21, 2002, number 630 in <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/policywatch/policywatch2002/630.htm>

⁶⁰Iranian foreign minister K. Kharrazi visited Ankara in April 2003, and M. Miro paid a visit to Ankara in January 2003 and declared that the (KADEK) Congress for Freedom and Democracy (the new title of Partiya Karkarane Kurdistan, PKK) was a terrorist organization and that Hatay was no more included in Syrian territories in school textbooks.', *Milliyet*, 'İstikrar Bozulursa Biz de Konuşuruz', April 7, 2003 and *Hürriyet*,

agreements between Turkey and Syria, which allow both countries to exchange military students and conduct joint military exercises,⁶¹ is also a good example for the volatile relations in the region while Syria felt threatened by the Military Training Cooperation Agreement' of February 1996 agreement only six years ago.

Resolving the Öcalan case was like the bursting of the bubble. Apart from the above-mentioned developments in bilateral relations, the rhetoric of the Syrian officials concerning the GAP project, being a big part of the water issue got milder to a great extent. For example the Minister of Irrigation Taha al-Atrash paid a groundbreaking visit to the Southeast Anatolian Project in 2001 on the purpose of getting information about the project and to utilize Turkey's experience about training of technical staff and agricultural education. Atrash has also called for the revival and reactivation of the joint technical committee which was formed in 1980 while Syria, although invited by Turkey, took the decision not to attend the meetings in 1993⁶² on the grounds that Turkey was buying time in order to complete the GAP.⁶³

The current international conjuncture prevents Syria from challenging Ankara and attempting to give the territorial (Hatay) dispute-water dispute an all Arab colouring and to turn them into conflicts between Turkey and the entire Arab world. However, it does not necessarily mean that the above-mentioned disputes especially the water dispute will not be the core of conflict between the Turks and Arabs in the future who regarded Turkey as the policeman of the United States having alignment with Israel and rejecting to be in any strategic partnership with the Arabs for long years because regardless of the ideologies of the governments coming to power in Turkey, Ankara's traditional Western-oriented foreign policy will always

Radikal, Milliyet, January 15, 2003 in Yakup Şalvarcı, *Pax Aqualis Türkiye-Suriye-İsrail İlişkileri, Su Sorunu ve Ortadoğu*, İstanbul, Zaman Kitabevi, 2003, p. 280.

⁶¹*The Christian Science Monitor*, 'Syria Forms New Alliances', June 26, 2002 in <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0626/p06s01-wome.html>

⁶²Murhaf Jouejati, 'Water Politics As High Politics the Case of Turkey and Syria', Henry J. Barkey, (ed), *Reluctant Neighbour: Turkey's Role in the Middle East*, Washington D.C.: US Institute of Peace Press, 1996, p. 140.

⁶³*Cumhuriyet*, 'GAP'a Komşu İlgisi', August 21, 2001.

endure. In addition, Turkey will not be so enthusiastic to have a binding agreement over water issue by the completion of the GAP project.

Nevertheless, seen from a different angle, Syria, being aware of the fact that the policy of sponsoring terrorism is clashing with its efforts to cope with image deterioration and with its efforts to be taken off the list of terrorism sponsors, will no more maintain its previous policy of handling the water issue at the cost of its relations with Turkey.

In sum, the current political situation in bilateral relations with Syria confirms the argument that the water dispute arising in the Euphrates river basin among Syria, Iraq and Turkey is not an irreconcilable issue just because the water scarcity hinders the peaceful co-existence of the three countries. On the contrary, the three parties' reluctance to reconcile with each other stemming from the mutual distrust has been the basic detriment to their peaceful coexistence. In other words, the historical hostilities, the ideological differences and the security priorities in the region rather than the water scarcity are the real determiners making the water issue irreconcilable.

It is all too well known that the Middle East region is by far the driest and most water scarce region in the world where most of the water resources originate from upstream countries outside the control of the users downstream and there is no appropriate political environment and regional cooperation for equitable distribution and use of water resources.⁶⁴

Therefore, it is mostly prophesied that the water struggle will lead to wars in the region. However, the increasing water scarcity and the fact that the water, unlike most resources, is a resource which does not have any alternative compel the regional countries to understand and recognize the seriousness of their water resource problems and to think of new ways to overcome them.

⁶⁴Nimrod Raphaeli, 'The Looming Crisis of Water in the Middle East', *Inquiry and Analysis-Economic Studies*, February 21, 2003.

For example, having serious problems with other riparian countries on the allocation of waters in their river basins, Turkey and Israel tried to realize the Manavgat project. It would transport the waters of the Manavgat river to Israel in huge floating polyurethane bags. Israel and Turkey would, thus, open the door of inter-basin cooperation to the riparian countries in the Euphrates-Tigris and the Jordan River Basins. Although the project meant that every drop of Manavgat water shipped to Israel would become a drop released from the Jordan River to Jordan and Palestine by Israel,⁶⁵ like the peace pipeline project, the Manavgat project could not be finalized because of various reasons.⁶⁶ But what is most realistic and threatening is the lack of cooperation including Arab neighbours, especially Syria, on developing non-conventional water resources, such as cloud-seeding, desalination, waste water reuse, and importing water from relatively wet zones. The inadequacy of the conventional water supply in the Jordan Basin to meet all the riparian countries' needs is one of the major reasons for the regional instability. For example, if Israel does not exploit the West Bank aquifers regardless of a Palestinian sovereignty in the West Bank in the future, it will need urgently new water resources to meet even her drinkable fresh water demand and Israel declares that it will not withdraw from the Golan Heights unless the sources of the Jordan River are not secured. This means that the Palestinians and Jordanians will suffer in future from serious water shortages.⁶⁷

Turkey, who has declared that its water supplies are running low and it will have to invest \$1bn a year in new dams, has failed to secure financing from the World Bank and other international lenders

⁶⁵Konuralp Pamukçu, 'Water-Related Cooperation Between Turkey and Israel', *Turkish Studies Institute*, p. 7 in <http://tsi.idc.ac.il/pamukcu.html>

⁶⁶The first reason was that the Manavgat project was perceived by the Arabs as Turkey's efforts for the revitalization of the peace water pipeline project, secondly the Arabs were uneasy about Ankara's plans to purchase the waters of the Manavgat river and they complained that Turkey was trying to supply water to Israel instead of releasing more water to Syria and Iraq. This policy of Turkey was perceived as Turkey's effort to have a trump card against the Arabs and it was a conspiracy against the Arab world.

⁶⁷Konuralp Pamukçu, 'Water-Related Cooperation Between Turkey and Israel', *Turkish Studies Institute*, p. 5 in <http://tsi.idc.ac.il/pamukcu.html>

and donors for the construction of the new dams such as Ilisu and Yusufeli.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the initial target for completion of the GAP project, 2005, has become unattainable because of the lack of investment.⁶⁹ Therefore, coping with the lack of trust and ill-feelings with the countries in the Middle East is a precondition for Turkey to be able to implement water-related projects, and most important of all, to realize the construction of new dams.

In a region where the bilateral relations are defined by love-hate characteristics, it has, so far, seemed rather difficult to provide a regional cooperation for an integrated and win-win approach to water issue. However, the growing urgency of increasing the water supply by non-conventional water resources in the Middle East and the necessity to find technological solutions to water scarcity problem will increase ecological, hydrological and economic interdependence. These multiplied interdependencies will probably bring about a certain thaw and a political consensus rather than an armed conflict among the regional countries and solve the present day deadlock in the regional political atmosphere

Conclusion

The initiation of the construction of the Southeast Anatolia Development Project (GAP) and its transformation from a largely hydroelectric project to an integrated, regional development programme alarmed Syria whose economy became largely dependent on agricultural production because of the decreasing oil industry income and lessening Arab foreign aid due to the falling oil prices.⁷⁰

⁶⁸*BBC News*, 'Turkey Faces Water Crisis', August 28, 2002.

⁶⁹'The Council of Ministers has declared the year 2010 as the new target date and the GAP administration has been commissioned to realise the implementation of the GAP 2010 Plan.' Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesinde Son Durum: Aralık 1998 (Status of GAP in December 1998), Ankara: GAP Regional Development Administration, p. 2 in Yönet Can Tezel, 'The Water Issue in Turkey's Relations With Syria', September 1999, unpublished dissertation, p. 52.

⁷⁰For further information see Sema Kalaycıoğlu and Ester Biton Ruben, *Ortadoğu Ekonomileri*, Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi İktisadi İdari Bilimler

Moreover, the great population increase in Syria has been the major reason for the higher demand for water. Therefore, the importance of the Euphrates to Syria has grown. Syria, which, on many occasions, asked to increase the guaranteed amount of water flowing into Syria from the Euphrates to 700 cubic meters per second, made use of the PKK card in order to induce Turkey to make concessions on the water issue.

Throughout the 1990s, Turkey tried to cope with the image that it is a strong upstream riparian state having surplus water, and therefore, it is able to requisition what it wants from the river system in the absence of a basin-wide agreement. It sought the ways of solving the security issue (Syrian support for the PKK) by means of negotiations with Syria and made some concessions like the 1987 temporary protocol of Economic Co-operation which stipulated that 500 cubic meters of water per second would flow to Syria. However, Damascus maintained its policy of playing the Kurdish card as a useful instrument of pressure.

Turkey found the world of 1990s a place of far fewer constraints and far greater possibilities than the era of the Cold War, which signified for Syria the loss of the strong ally. In other words, with the end of the Cold War, Turkey's immediate and constant security threat was removed and it opened for Ankara new vistas in Central Asia and the Balkans. The Gulf War, which placed northern Iraq within Turkey's sphere of influence and thus led to Arab's perception of Turkey as the region's policeman, also reinstated Turkey's importance in the eyes of the United States. Added to the improving relations with Washington, its signing a military training and cooperation agreement with Israel reinforced Syria's sense of vulnerability and weakness vis- a-vis Turkey.

Syria's as well as Arabs' fear of Turkey's new role unfolded as Turkey proposed some projects like peace pipeline apart from the GAP project. Put it bluntly, both projects were perceived as a water weapon Turkey is trying to use to overwhelm Arabs' oil weapon. Therefore, Syria and Iraq were able to win back easily from the Arab League and the oil-rich Arab countries not to finance the GAP

project. This left Turkey with no choice but to bear the huge cost of the GAP from its own hard-pressed budget. Together with the cost of fighting against the Kurdish separatism, the economic burden of the GAP, which was perceived as a project to transform the socio-economic structure of one of the most backward regions of the country, weakened Turkish economy to a great extent. On the other hand, Turkey's concerns about the PKK's efforts to be recognized as a political organization in the 1990s were reinforced by Syria's insistence on aiding and encouraging Öcalan to have meetings with high ranking European officials in Damascus. Yet, the main reason prompting Turkey to initiate the October crisis was the developments precipitating the foundation of a possible Kurdish state in the northern Iraq.

The October crisis, which led to the Adana agreement, brought a relative solution to Turkey's Kurdish separatism issue. However, divergence of views about the water issue still prevails, between the two countries. For example, the disagreement on the very definition of the river system, the lack of principles on sharing international waters such as 'equitable and reasonable utilisation and participation' make harder to reach a consensus.

For Turkey, water has been a technical issue which could be dealt with separately and it has always preferred to attain an agreement on scientific and technical basis rather than an ideological and political one. It complained that much of the water flowing downstream was being wasted due to inferior techniques and that Syria's declared irrigation targets were artificial. Syria, on the other hand, complains that Turks send to Syria water that has already been used to irrigate and polluted with fertilizers, pesticides, and excrement.

The fact that the only remaining ray of light was the alliance with Iran and the fact that it could strengthen its relations only with some countries such as France, Russia and Iraq, its deteriorating state command economy urged Damascus to adopt a new policy, a rapprochement with its neighbours and coping with the image deterioration. Damascus has currently seemed enthusiastic to cooperate with Turkey for the efficient utilization of water, while it rejected Turkey's proposal, the 'Three-Staged Plan' to reach an equitable allocation of the Euphrates-Tigris waters in the past. The

signing of the military agreements between Turkey and Syria also portray how volatile the relations in the region are.

The occupation of Iraq and Washington's growing intimidating rhetoric toward Syria, will probably force Syria to be more cooperative with the regional countries in developing non-conventional water resources and to support an appropriate political environment and regional cooperation for equitable distribution and use of water resources. In other words, although the increasing water scarcity should have been a factor for Syria as well as for Turkey in order not to put raw prejudices against each other ahead of their respective state interests, the signs of the current thaw between the two countries show that the security priorities in the region rather than the water deficit determine the current relations.