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KURDISH REGIONAL GOVERNMENT RELATIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY AFTER THE ARAB SPRING

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İÇİNDEKİLER

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the Middle East, which has become politically and economically unstable due to the tensions in many countries under the name of the Arab Spring, has caused various disturbances, especially in the Iraqi State and the so-called IKBY (*Irak Kürdistan Bölgesel Yönetimi*, Iraqi Regional Kurdish Administration), which wanted to keep itself away from this process. Turkey, observing these events from the outside, openly stated that it would resort to military intervention if its security was at risk during this period. Turkey, which could not reconcile with the IKBY on many issues, has realised that new problem areas have emerged with the Arab Spring. In this framework, Turkey redesigned its relations and responded to the IKBY, which it stated that it had relations with the PKK (*Kürdistan İşçi Partisi*, Kurdistan Workers Party), with foreign policy steps.

After the independence referendum held by the IKBY on 25 September 2017, a new beginning period started for Iraq, Turkey and the Middle East region. The country witnessed a new political landscape after the elections on May 12, 2018, with the two dominant actors in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, KDP (Kürdistan Demokratik Partisi, the Kurdistan Democratic Party) and the KYB (Kürdistan Yurtsever Birliği, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), demonstrating their ability to influence the formation of the parliament and decision-making process

in Baghdad while maintaining their strength. The IKBY realised that its expectations before the referendum were not possible and paid a heavy price. While increasing its political influence in Iraq, the IKBY has also tried to repair its regional relations with other regional actors, especially Turkey. The US and Iran, which are competing in the region, have sought to reinforce their allies and strengthen their partners politically and militarily while reorganising their calculations in Baghdad and Erbil. Turkey, considering these changing parameters, has revisited its relations with Baghdad and Erbil.As a result of the local, regional and global changes, Ankara and Erbil have rebuilt their future relations in line with mutual interests.

After AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, the Justice and Development Party) came to power by winning the elections in 2002, Turkey's relations with the IKBY underwent a gradual change. In this process, Turkey abandoned its security-oriented foreign policy and shifted its relations to a more commercial and economic dimension. However, despite the AKP government, the power of Turkish public opinion and bureaucracy dominated the country's foreign policy until 2008. With the appointment of Ahmet Davutoğlu as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, relations with the IKBY were softened on the basis of the principles of the new Turkish foreign policy.   With this change, Turkey has tried to be effective in the region due to its geographical location. Especially in the recent period, it is observed that Erbil has been trying to establish good bilateral relations with Turkey, with which it has become closer in order to eliminate the economic and sociological negative consequences of the political steps taken by Erbil in the past.

This book reveals the importance of the IKBY in terms of Turkey's Middle East policies. In particular, the process that started with the Arab Spring created new power balances, while Turkey could not remain indifferent to the process due to its geographical location, the fact that the region is an energy exporting region and Turkey is dependent on foreign energy. In

the study, qualitative research methods were used and books, scientific articles, theses, dissertations, newspaper articles and internet pages in the field of International Relations were utilised. In this way, as the research progresses with the research method, the opportunity to change and renew within the scope of new information has been gained and in this direction, answers to the research questions have been tried to be found.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Arab Spring

It is the popular uprisings that started in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread to the Middle East and from there to North Africa. This definition includes dictatorial regimes, economic oligarchies, political decay and corruption, restriction of people's freedom and freedom of expression, and the increasing difficulty of human life. Therefore, the people protested in order to get rid of these unfavourable situations. During this period, people's desire to live humanely, to benefit from fundamental rights and freedoms, to have a fair social structure and administration, to ensure freedom of religion, to respect spiritual values, to have world-class rights and freedoms of expression gradually increased. Those in power ignored these demands for many years, and the failure of the leaders to move towards democracy and respond to them led to the Arab Spring (Tekek, 2012). In addition, other causes of these uprisings include poor economic performance, bribery, favouritism, widespread corruption and inequality between rich and poor (Bulaç, 2013).

On 17 December 2010, Tunisian peddler Mohamed Bouazizi Sidi set himself on fire after his street stall was confiscated and he was ill-treated, and the reaction grew as people took to the streets. The reactions continued until the beginning of the "Arab Spring" and the "Jasmine Revolution" (Tekek, 2012). As a result of the protests of the Tunisian people, the regime of Zeinel Abidin Ben Ali, who ruled the country for 23 years, collapsed,

forcing him to leave the country. This social movement that started in Tunisia soon became a source of inspiration for many people in the Middle East and North Africa. While the impact of the popular revolts and resistance in Arab countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Bahrain, Jordan, Yemen, Syria, etc. has been great, these effects have been weak in Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Morocco and Mauritania (Paksoy et al., 2012). The social movements that started with protests in Tunisia ended with the fall of dictatorial regimes in "Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen". In other countries, governments promised various reforms to maintain their power. When the promises made in Syria were not fulfilled, social reactions turned into a civil war (Hatunoğlu, 2011).

Factors Affecting the Arab Spring

Internal factors

In the political structure of the Arab geography, there is a dictatorial structure in some countries and a dictatorial and totalitarian structure in others. For many years, the people have had to live under restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms and oppressive policies that have manifested in all areas of life. Another factor pushing the limits of people's endurance in such a difficult situation is the worsening economic situation. The attitude of the Arab authorities and their pressure on the people were criticised, and the popular movement, which started as an individual one, turned into a collective one. The leaders did not listen to the demands of the citizens at the political level. From this perspective, it would be incomplete to talk about a single factor that contributed to the emergence of the Arab Spring. The protesters demanded a wide range of reforms and these demands have changed over time.

The internal causes that led to the Arab Spring are divided into two groups: unemployment, economic difficulties, kleptocracy, inequalities in income distribution, inequality, religious oppression and legal restrictions on means of transport (Anderson, 2011).

Looking at the difficult economic conditions that led to the Arab Spring, according to the World Bank, the population of the Arab countries is approximately 356 million people and this population is increasing day by day. It is estimated that this population will reach 380 million in 2020 (Hürriyet, "World and Turkey Population in 2050", 19.10.2010). As a result of the increasing population, it is almost impossible for Arab administrations to employ the young population with their current policies.

Unemployment, one of the economic problems of Arab countries, has pushed people to the limits of endurance. For example, in the case of Egypt, the unemployment rate between 1981 and 2000 was 9.4%; after 2000, about 90% of the unemployed were educated youth (Öztürkler, 2012). The worsening of these and other similar situations with increasing employment, the fact that the Arab authorities have made no effort to improve them, the fact that the Arab administrative elites continue to benefit from their own interests and state property, and the fact that they alone can improve the geo-economic and sociological situation have only worsened the situation. These economic conditions were the main reasons that pushed people to take to the streets and demonstrate (İnaç, 2012).

The Arab people fought for their political rights as well as their economic demands. The main reason for the protesters' demands for political rights is that Arab states do not have a libertarian structure regarding political rights. On the other hand, the political space of the opposition parties, which struggled to survive in the face of the protests against the government, was narrowed, and a political structure was created that envisaged the limitation of legislative and representation. Controversial elections, media censorship and repression, and restrictions on citizens' freedom of expression have paved the way for the political demands of the people (İnaç, 2012).

External Factors

One of the critical effects of globalisation is that no state can be isolated from the effects of the global arena. Although the Arab world does not have an open structure, it has a structure that directly affects and is affected by world events.

There were three events that negatively affected the importance of the Middle East in the global order and had a serious impact on the region: the shift of the axis of international relations from the Middle East to Asia, the American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the policies that occurred after the 11 September attacks (Inaç, 2012).

In 2007, during the economic crisis that affected the USA, Arab states were also affected by these economic developments. In this process, oil, which was the important export of Arab states to Europe, had negative economic consequences. On the other hand, the increase in food prices during this period made it difficult for people in economic crisis to access food products. While the crisis was affecting the people, the indifference of the leaders of the countries to the situation, which was the main cause of the protests, and their luxurious lifestyles, the Wikileaks documents irrefutably revealed this situation that exceeded the limits of people's tolerance (Yavuz & Erdurmaz, 2012).

Another reason for the onset of the Arab Spring is that the rapidly growing internet and social media movements have become new spaces of protest and means of expressing their reactions. The most important thing about the Arab events of 2011 was not how the protesters' standards of civic responsibility shaped their globalisation ambitions, but how they used technology, shared ideas and applied tactics. What is important is to know how the protesters' ambitions and methods gave the impression of different meanings (Anderson, 2011).

Regional Effects of the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring, which started in Tunisia, has also affected countries such as Egypt, Libya and Syria and led to significant changes in the region. The possible consequences of the Arab Spring, which continues to have an impact today, are clear in every aspect. If we evaluate the protest movement that started with the Arab Spring in terms of its causes and consequences, the event is a revolt since there is no leader to direct the events (Orhan, 2013).

In terms of its strategic importance for the Middle East, the Arab world in particular and the world in general, the Arab Spring is a political, economic, social and historical event. This event, which took place in a strategic region, has left a deep mark on the region and the world, the effects of which will continue for decades. As a result, it seems very difficult to predict the future of the countries affected by the Arab Spring (Toby, 2011).

Consequences of the Arab Spring

Libya is the only country whose regime has been overthrown with NATO support since the beginning of the Arab Spring. Following the Arab Spring, the government tried to recover from the negative consequences of the civil war in Libya and to rebuild the state with new institutions and organisations. The different interests of different groups have prevented political stability. On the other hand, the weak security of the country prevents the utilisation of its resources. The instability in Libya, which is experiencing the same problems in the ongoing process, is not expected to end in the near future. (Elwatannews, "Benghazi bombed", 21.03.2023).

In Tunisia, where the Arab Spring started, While President Zeinel Abidine Ben Ali was removed from office, state institutions continued to exist in the same form. The fact that parties with different views shaped the country's politics increased the opposition, and the failure to fulfil the demands

paved the way for a new protest movement. On the other hand, the political, economic and social conditions of the country increased anxiety (Koçak, 2012).

The situation in Egypt was not different from Tunisia and Libya. When the "Justice" party, which had come to power in the elections, failed to fulfil its promises, the people rose up again and the government was overthrown with the intervention of the army. Egypt continues to face economic problems and political instability. On the other hand, the violation of the constitution and the irregular functioning of the government led to renewed protests (Aydın, 2014).

Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, there has been no change in the Yemeni regime and some soldiers and commanders loyal to the previous president have remained in their positions. There have been some internal conflicts in the military organisations. In addition, the activities of the so-called "*Southern Movement*" and al-Qaeda have also affected the Yemeni regime.

It is evident from this that the Arab Spring, which spread in waves and gradually expanded its influence, confused the Arab states. Although the Arab Spring has brought political rights and freedoms to the citizens of Arab countries, it has not improved their welfare and living conditions. However, Arab countries, which have been living under oppression for a long time, do not have much time left to improve their situation. Countries will surely pay the price. One should not forget the bloodshed of the French Revolution, which transformed slavery into freedom and became the greatest example of the struggle against oppression, bribery and feudalism. Looking at the results of the revolution alone, the French set an example for the world in terms of freedom and human rights. Therefore, real change in the Arab world needs time (Pirinçci, 2014). In addition, the events of the Arab Spring were reflected in other Arab states and led to the emergence of different and new experiences in the political field.

The instability and violence that emerged in Syria with the spread of the Arab Spring to Syria has had two important consequences: Firstly, it became a battleground for radical opposition forces within the country, and secondly, the population turned towards and supported such opposition groups out of desperation. The government has been preoccupied with both an internal crisis that started in 2011 and international economic sanctions (Reçber and Ayhan, 2013).

Developments in the Countries Affected by the Arab Spring Process

Arab Spring process in Tunisia

On 17 December 2010, the first phase of the "Arab Spring" movement started in Tunisia when Bouazizi, aged 26, set himself on fire. After this tragic event, the Tunisian people rose up and protested. As a result of the popular movement in Tunisia, President Zeinel Abidin left the country (Ulutaş and Torlak, 2011).

When the protests started, it was not foreseen that the social opposition movement could overthrow the government. In order to better understand this popular movement, it is necessary to examine the history and ideological foundations of the social and political opposition to the government that started to emerge in the country after 1956 (Ayhan, 2012).

Social resistance to the government began under Habib Ben Ali Bourguiba. The social opposition movements that emerged in Bourguiba's early years were based on Arab nationalism and tribalism, but leftist and Islamic opposition became superficial in the 1970s. Before the onset of the Arab Spring, economic problems and unemployment led to small-scale protests and criticism in society. The most obvious example is the general strike that marked the 1970s. During this period, trade unions increased pressure on the government to improve labour wages. From time to time, small demonstrations were organised against the government's economic policies (Koçak, 2012).

In 1984, the increase in the prices of basic necessities to support agricultural producers directly affected the price of bread. As a result, the "*Bread Rebellion*" resistance movements have emerged. Another uprising was the 2008 *Gafsa* uprising. Unlike the others, this protest lasted one week and spread throughout the country. The government used force to suppress the protests and at least 200 protesters were imprisoned.

According to Yavuz and Erdurmaz, the increase in the young population in Tunisia and the diversification of manufacturing with the expansion of education signalled a change in the social and economic system. Changes in this sector have played an important role in increasing social resistance. Young people under the age of 20 constitute more than 60 per cent of the country's population. The unemployment rate has risen from 13 per cent to 30 per cent among young people. This rate shows that most of them are educated young people, but it is difficult to find a job (Yavuz and Erdurmaz, 2012).

Tunisian Muhammed Bouzazi, who dropped out of university and worked as a peddler to support his family, was subjected to pressure and harassment by the police. Unable to bear this situation, he protested by setting himself on fire. As the number of protests and supporters increased after Bouzazi's death, this individual action turned into a collective revolt. When these protests could not be prevented, Zine El Abidine fulfilled the protesters' demand to revive the economy and promised to provide employment to 50,000 university students in a short time (Yavuz and Erdurmaz, 2012). However, despite his promise, he announced that he would not run for the next election due to the increasing incidents. However, the pace of the demonstrations did not decrease, on the contrary, they continued to increase. Unable to intervene, Zeinel Abidin had to call on the army to stop the protests. However, the army refused to fire at the people, therefore the protests could not be suppressed.

Despite all the counter-insurgency measures and policies formulated by the government, the protests were fuelled by associations, young bloggers, journalists, professional associations, satellite TV channels, social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, etc. Unemployment, corruption, poverty, economic inequality, political corruption fuelled the Tunisian popular movement.

As a result, President Zineel Abidine Ben Ali resigned after 23 years in office and fled to Saudi Arabia on 14 January 2011. Approximately 300 people were killed during these protests. Tunisian Prime Minister Ghannouchi was also forced to resign. This marked the beginning of a new era in Tunisia. The state held its first free national elections in October 2011. As a result of the elections, the Islamic En Nahda Party received the highest number of votes with 40 per cent (Ulutaş and Torlak, 2011). The debate between secularism and Islamism since Zeinel Abidin's time resurfaced with the assassination of a leftist party leader (Malsin, 2015). Tunisia entered the post-revolutionary phase with political instability and deepening political polarisation (Birdal, 2016).

Arab Spring process in Egypt

Egypt is one of the most critical states in the Middle East in terms of history and geography and one of the most populous states with a population of over 80 million. Egypt is one of the most important Arab countries in terms of its geopolitical position and population. It is the connection point between Asia and Africa. It is also an important strategic transit point from the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea and from there to the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal (Diriöz, 2012).

Egypt is a multi-party democracy. However, it has a political structure far from this system. Hosni Mubarak, who took power in 1981, ruled Egypt for 30 years. During this period, no attempt was made for democratic governance and major economic problems were experienced. Before the Arab

Spring, President Hosni Mubarak and his entourage lived in wealth while the Egyptian people complained of poverty. The results of the uprising against the Tunisian government gave hope to the Egyptian people and the people started an uprising to overthrow the Mubarak administration, which did not fulfil their reform demands. Seeking to reform the Egyptian government, the US encouraged opposition groups to replace authoritarian governments in Middle Eastern countries with new actors (Orsam, 2012).

The protests that started in Tunisia were instrumental in the Egyptian people's boycott of the Shura and National Assembly elections in Egypt in 2010. Different segments of the society organised demonstrations before the elections, claiming that Mubarak would intervene in the elections. In the "6 April movement", nearly 100 protesters were detained in front of the Shura Council. The Mubarak administration banned demonstrations, controlled television broadcasts and restricted communication. Thus, the aim was to break the connection between the rivals.

In addition to the 6 April movement, another youth movement participating in the protests in Egypt is the "We are all Khaled Said" movement. Opponents of the regime organised on social media and took to the streets to draw attention to human rights violations and the excessive use of force by the police, which resulted in deaths. The Khaled Saeed movement sought to give a voice to all Egyptians like him who have faced violence.

Mubarak's removal of opposition groups from the elections, pressure on candidates, undemocratic practices, oppression, torture, corruption, income inequality, and foreign policy activities linked to Israel and the US were the main reasons for the Arab Spring.

The protests in Egypt turned into a popular movement in the Middle East with the domino effect of the events in Tunisia, and the Arab Spring briefly affected Egypt, one of the key countries of the region. Unable to overcome the tensions

created by the 2010 elections, people took to the streets on 25 January and overthrew the Mubarak regime. Anti-Mubarak social opposition movements found a significant number of supporters in the political arena. The most organised and supported party was the Muslim Brotherhood. The protesters made Tahrir Square the centre of a protracted protest and demonstrated. The Muslim Brotherhood declared its support for the demonstration held in Tahrir Square on 28 January. The Mubarak administration sent security forces to Tahrir Square to suppress the protests, which led to clashes between the protesters and the security forces.

The most prominent supporter of the protests was Mohamed el Baradei, the former chairman of the Nuclear Energy Board. Baradei, who travelled to Egypt, met with the protesters in Tahrir and expressed his support for them and said that the events in Egypt should be compared to those in Tunisia. Baradei was at the forefront of these protests in Egypt, which led him to become vice-president after Mubarak. Baradei was also supported by the Muslim Brotherhood (Al Jazeera, 2014).

In this process, a new opposition group emerged around the Muslim Brotherhood and Mohamed el-Baradei, consisting of young people who are very good at using technological devices.

Instead of TV and radio, social networks such as Twitter and Facebook often played an important role in the uprising in Egypt. The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions were also defined as *"Twitter and Facebook revolutions*". The demonstrations were announced worldwide through these social networks (Aktaş, 2012).

In order to prevent this, the Mubarak administration blocked access to social media, a platform where protesters organised and communicated. However, despite all these efforts, the demonstration on 28 January could not be prevented. Many people were injured in clashes during the demonstrations. President Hosni Mubarak realised that the situation would not calm down and announced that he would dismiss the

government and make reforms. In the face of increasing pressure from the public, he announced that he would not be a candidate in the elections and his son would not participate in the elections. However, the public did not consider these statements sufficient and demanded his immediate resignation and hand over the administration to the army on 11 February 2011.

In fact, the future of Egypt was determined by the USA. Everything that happened stemmed from the desire of the US to turn the Arab Spring in its favour in order to organise the Middle East around a new regional strategy according to its own interests. Feeling that new political players should play a role, the US withdrew its support for the Mubarak administration and took the opposition position. As a result, the Mubarak era came to an end and in June 2012, Mohamed Morsi, the candidate of the "Muslim Brotherhood" party, won the presidential election and became the President of Egypt. This transformative movement, which started with great hope, unfortunately ended in a coup d'état against the first elected President. The election was a historic opportunity for Egyptians, but on 3 July 2013, a military coup led by Chief of General Staff Sisi overthrew the Morsi administration. In a process that resulted in a military coup, Morsi and Muslim Brotherhood leaders were first banned from travelling abroad and then sentenced to life imprisonment and death penalty (Al Jazeera, 2015).

Arab Spring process in Libya

When Libya gained its independence in 1951 under the leadership of King Sayyid Idris, it was a kingdom with a federal structure and a constitutional monarchy. Muammar Gaddafi, a 27-year-old young officer, became the new leader of Libya with a coup d'état on 1 September 1969 (Ceviz, 2011).

Two important issues regarding the Gaddafi era in Libya need to be addressed. The first is the expression of "*Zawara*", the ideology of the new regime. The other is the "*Green Book*",

which provides a clear definition of this new ideology and outlines its implementation. After coming to power, Gaddafi adopted what he called the "*Third Universal Theory*", a synthesis of Islam and socialism, and was fascinated by Arab nationalism. In implementing his ambitious plan, he first suspended the existing legal system and introduced Sharia law. This ideological model played an important role in shaping Libya's foreign policy. In the period after the coup, progress was made in social sectors such as education, health, etc. The military coup was a coup that gained the acceptance of the society as a result of the social and economic developments, but it also brought along various conflicts. Gaddafi liberated Libyan society from royal rule, but banned the establishment of political parties after the coup. He tried to establish a socialist society and state administration through a single party system. However, in order to consolidate his power, he liquidated the structures that he perceived as a threat and kept these structures outside the system to ensure this. Gaddafi, who started the liquidation process first with military power, realised that he could not succeed in the short term despite all his efforts in the coup d'état organised against him in 1975. The coup attempt failed and Gaddafi sentenced 22 coup plotters to death.

Student protests, which were the most important political movements in Libya under Idris Khan, also emerged during the Gaddafi era with demonstrations against the regime at Benghazi University and Tripoli University. The Gaddafi regime directly intervened in these demonstrations and arrested hundreds of young people. Despite all the measures taken, these demonstrations continued for a long time and Gaddafi had to take harsh decisions to stop these demonstrations. Among the arrested students, Omar Dabbob and Mohammed Saud were hanged in Benghazi Square. Other arrested students were sentenced to life imprisonment. Those who escaped from these students continued their activities against the regime in the countries they travelled to. It is worth mentioning

that Ali Tarhouni, the Minister of Economy of the National Transitional Council, and Mahmoud Shaman, the spokesman of the Transitional Council, who returned to Libya after Gaddafi's fall from power, were at the forefront.

In time, the perception that the Gaddafi regime was shaping the society on a socialist model was formed and opposition groups started to form. As a result, relations between Gaddafi and Islamists deteriorated and Gaddafi explicitly warned Islamist groups not to interfere with the socialist economic policy of his government. With this behaviour, Gaddafi received the backlash of young people exiled for their participation in Islamist groups and student movements, tribes outside the political structure and human rights defenders. All this shows that, for various reasons, the social base of opposition to the regime in Libya before 2011 was quite strong.

Unlike the Arab countries in the region, Gaddafi did not have good relations with the West and tried to create his own economic system. Gaddafi's policy of repression against the opposition has put him in a difficult situation on the international stage. Libya was recognised by the world community as a country supporting terrorism due to its position against Western countries. Before these events, Gaddafi joined the Arab countries and established the Arab League. The event that lit the fire of the Libyan revolution was the arrest of Fathi Terbil, a lawyer for 1200 prisoners and an opponent of the regime, who was killed in a prison raid in 1996. The demonstration in front of Benghazi police station for his release escalated with the violent intervention of the security forces against the demonstrators (Yavuz and Erdurmaz, 2012).

After Tunisia and Egypt, the Arab Spring also affected Libya in February 2011. The social movement in Libya started in Benghazi and the unrest quickly spread to other provinces. Gaddafi supporters and opponents organised demonstrations against each other. These demonstrations cost many lives and Gaddafi's harsh measures to suppress the rebellion led

to a deepening of the crisis. On 17 February, opponents of the regime organised a demonstration dubbed the "*Day of Rage*", the most violent to date. The protests, which started in Benghazi, spread rapidly and led to the establishment of the Anti-Gaddafi National Council, which received the support of the whole world in the region. The National Transitional Council (NTC) strengthened the social opposition movement that spread throughout the country and caused it to become a permanent organisation (Kuşoğlu, 2012). In comparison, the uprising in Libya had more bloody consequences than the events in Tunisia and Egypt.

Following the use of heavy weapons and excessive force by Gaddafi's army against the population and the shooting of civilians by helicopters, international public protests against the Libyan regime began. The first significant international support for the opposition to Gaddafi came from France. On 22 February, Muammar Gaddafi appeared in public and denied reports that he had fled the country. He said that he was in Tripoli and that he would continue his struggle against the opposition until the end. With these words, he drew the attention of the whole world to himself. Following Gaddafi's statement, the West took the issue to the United Nations, arguing that the process would be more bloody for the protesters. However, Gaddafi stated that Libya would become a second Vietnam for Europe if the West intervened.

The uprising that started as a demonstration against Gaddafi soon turned into a civil war. In this process, many civilians were harmed by the regime forces. The incident mobilised the international community and the UN Security Council declared Libya a no-fly zone due to increasing human rights violations. When the sanctions failed, coalition forces decided to launch air strikes. Thus, NATO launched an operation and stated that it would continue until the Gaddafi regime surrendered. On 20 October 2011, Muammar Gaddafi, his son Mutasimile and Abu Bakr Younis Jaber, a member of the Revolutionary Command

Council, were killed. Since the overthrow of Gaddafi by NATO intervention, at least 50.000 people have lost their lives in the civil war (Diriöz, 2012).

Following the overthrow of Gaddafi, the armed opposition and IŞİD (*Irak ve Şam İslam Devleti*, Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham)   continued to commit crimes in Libya. The administration could not be brought under control, courts were closed, judges and lawyers were attacked (Abuhasan, 2013). While security problems emerged in the region, security, legal and governance problems were encountered.

Arab Spring process in Yemen

Yemen is strategically located at the crossroads of Africa and Asia. Although it is located on a historical trade route, it is a country with 65% Sunni and 35% Shiite ethnic identity. This situation caused it to have a rich cultural structure and caused it to be known as "*Happy Yemen*" in history. However, there were many civil wars in the country due to conflicts between Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul Nasser and the King's supporters in the 1960s, nationalists and communists in the 1970s, and southern ethnic groups in the 1980s. In 1990, North and South Yemen were united (Gün, 2012), but due to administrative problems, they could not become a de facto nation state.

Chronic protests in the country since the 2000s were legitimised in late 2010 by popular movements in other Arab states. Although almost all of the country's population is armed, the process of the opposition popular movement in Yemen has been more peaceful than in other Arab countries (Kurşun, 2014). The first social movement in Yemen started in January 2011 when young people gathered in Al Tahrir Square in Sana'a to demand freedom, justice and regime change. Demonstrations were organised to protest unemployment and the monopolisation of all economic opportunities by the authorities. Under the guise of a youth movement, protesters

demanded jobs, education, equal rights and the resignation of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh (Gün, 2012).

The activist Tawakkul Kerman, whom the Yemeni people call the "*Mother of the Revolution*" and who is the international public face of the uprising, has attracted attention during the protests in the country. However, Yemeni opposition parties have been cautious towards the uprising. In the first stage, they stated that critical reforms should be realised rather than the resignation of President Saleh. The opposition parties did not want to confront the regime directly. However, this attitude did not last long and they demanded President Saleh's resignation.

President Salih took some economic measures against the protests. He increased the salaries of civil servants and army personnel, reduced taxes and cancelled university tuition fees. Projects have been developed to provide employment to new university graduates and the number of unemployed has been tried to be reduced. However, these economic measures taken by the President did not work and he was forced into political compromise by the opposition. Thereupon, Salih announced that he and his son would not participate in the upcoming elections (Gün, 2012).

However, as the demonstrations intensified, Saleh took his supporters to the streets and responded to the protesters. The police tried to deter the protesters by using force, but it did not work. As a result of this incident, 52 people lost their lives. As the opposition to Saleh grew, 150,000 people marched to the exchange centre in Sana'a. When Saleh could not prevent the protests, he was forced to declare a state of emergency. However, as resignations occurred in many departments across the country, the possibility of a new civil war in Yemen increased. This led KİK (*Körfez İşbirliği Koseyi*, the Gulf Cooperation Council) to prioritise Yemen at a time when urgent decisions had to be taken. The KİK advised the Yemeni President to resign as soon as possible, confident that his family, himself and his advisers would not be prosecuted. The

terms of the special presidential election to be held after the constitutional amendment were also set out in this negotiating proposal. Despite being offered this agreement three times, President Saleh refused to sign it. After the last refusal, violent clashes broke out between the regime forces and the opposition, and the regime opponents organised a bomb attack on the presidential palace mosque. The head of the Advisory Council was killed and President Saleh was seriously wounded in the attack (Gün, 2012).

Following the attack, the President and senior officials fled Yemen to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment. In the meantime, the president's son, Ahmed Saleh, and his supporters continued to clash with those opposed to his rule. After President Saleh's return to Yemen following his medical treatment, international organisations made various proposals for his removal from office. President Saleh did not accept any of these proposals. When the KİK demanded Saleh's resignation, the president could not take it any longer and was forced to resign. Saleh agreed to step down on the condition that no criminal charges would be filed against him or his family. On 27 February 2012, Mansour al-Hadi won the presidential election and was sworn in (Aras, 2014).

According to Arı, after a while, groups dissatisfied with President Hadi's administration started to manifest themselves in the country. The most prominent of these was the established Houthi movement. In August 2014, the Houthi movement organised demonstrations all over the country. As a result of civil disobedience movements, the government was forced to resign. After dismissing the president and prime minister, the Houthis carried out a coup in 2015 and dissolved the parliament (Arı, 2015). After the Houthi coup, political turmoil still continues in Yemen.

Arab Spring process in Syria

Started on 17 December 2010, the Arab Spring was successful in Tunisia, followed by similar protests in Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria. Following the successful revolutionary process in Tunisia, the demands of those who started the social movements in Egypt in January 2011, Libya in February 2011 and Syria in March 2011 are closely related to the demands for change in Tunisia. In Egypt, the fall of the Hosni Mubarak regime raised the hopes of the society. The demonstrations in Libya were very bloody and Gaddafi was lynched and killed. In Syria, similar to Libya, social uprisings turned into bloody demonstrations and resulted in a civil war.

The civil war that has continued until today has led to the deepening of the crisis in Syria (Devran and Özcan, 2016). Upon the demonstrations, President Bashar al-Assad stated that he would lift the state of emergency that had been in effect for years. He released 15 young people detained in Daraa and announced projects to create employment. However, the Syrian opposition thought that the reforms were for show. When the opposition continued to demonstrate, Assad suppressed the demonstrations by using violence. The protests quickly turned into a civil war, resulting in the deaths of 800 people and the arrest or disappearance of 10 thousand people. Although Assad declared a general amnesty for prisoners in order to maintain his power, he attacked Humus only 2 days later.

As the demonstrations intensified, President Assad approved the electoral law on the formation of a new party and announced that elections would be held in 2012. Shortly after these announcements, pro-Assad and Baas regime supporters marched in Damascus on 11 July 2011 and stoned the American and French embassies. After this incident, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton immediately held a press conference and declared that Assad had lost his legitimacy in Syria. She strongly condemned the stoning of the American Embassy and called on Americans living in Syria to leave Syria. The

US announced its withdrawal from Syria after the attack on the embassy in Damascus. A similar reaction was shown by the Gulf countries and they wanted the bloodshed in Syria to stop. In this process, Russia was the only country to declare its support for the current Syrian government. Russia announced that it would continue to sell arms to Syria and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in an interview with a news agency, "*We think that the Assad regime should be given time to implement the promised reforms*" (Yavuz and Erdurmaz, 2012). With the involvement of global actors in the civil war in Syria, the problem has become intractable. Millions of Syrians became refugees, Turkey opened its doors to Syrian refugees and pursued a policy of supporting regime opponents to suppress the Syrian uprising (Devran and Özcan, 2016).

The uprising in Syria, which started under the influence of the Arab Spring, turned into chaos and left the regime in a difficult situation. Upon the change in geopolitical balances, the Assad regime's harsh reaction to the protests of the opposition groups reversed the reform steps and forced the regime to armed intervention. The crisis, which turned into a civil war in Syria, had consequences beyond the borders of the country. Russia supported the Assad regime with the idea that the crisis in Syria could affect its future security (Semin and Sandıklı, 2012).

The Syrian crisis has become a global security problem rather than a regional one. Assad's attempts to prevent the gathering of anti-regime groups under one roof led to the intensification of the civil war. However, the protracted civil war paved the way for the emergence and increased activities of terrorist organisations such as DEAŞ (*Irak Şam İslam Devleti,* Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) in Syria.

Russian and U.S. officials met in Geneva in June 2012 to discuss military intervention in Syria. As a result of this meeting, they agreed to actively participate militarily in the event of chemical weapons being used in Syria.

Despite social uprisings leading to the overthrow of leaders in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, Bashar al-Assad's crisis management in Syria prevented his removal from power (Ersoy, 2014). One of the reasons for this was the pro-government and pro-regime stance of the security services in Syria, while in Egypt and Tunisia the army and intelligence units were against their governments. Since the opposition was able to attract a small number of soldiers from the Syrian army, there was no serious break in the army hierarchy. Moreover, the support of Iran and Russia to the Syrian regime in Syria made the outcome of the uprising different from other Arab countries. Russia prevented international pressure on Syria by vetoing the UN Security Council's 2nd negative resolution on Syria on 4 February 2012. Iran, Syria's geographical strategic partner, has provided military and financial aid to the Assad regime (Orsam, 2012). The inability of the opponents of the Assad regime to form a united opposition coalition led to the prolongation of the Arab Spring in Syria. Opponents of the regime came together under the name of the Syrian National Council.

Turkey's Middle East and Turkish Foreign Policy after the Arab Spring

The rapid changes in the Middle East following the Arab Spring have further complicated international relations and global politics. The opposition movements that spread from one country to another with a domino effect have led to a change in international politics in the Middle East. The above-mentioned movements are internal uprisings and movements supported by the majority of citizens that attract the attention of the world public opinion.

The Arab Spring has attracted the attention of regional and international actors. In this process, international agreements were made to solve the problem. These developments in the neighbouring geography are very important for Turkish foreign policy. Turkey has not remained indifferent to the

developments in the region. It has tried to find solutions to the crisis that emerged in this process and to shape international policy in a way to create regional interests for itself. Turkey has endeavoured to protect its interests in the countries affected by the Arab Spring with the policies it implemented before the events. This has led to efforts to develop more effective policies to protect public security.

As a central country in its location, Turkey has played the role of a state that considers not only itself but also the stability and security of its neighbours. As a natural consequence of this situation, Turkey has looked closely at the problems of the Middle East and sought solutions.

Western countries have criticised Turkey's foreign policy and stated that Turkey has shifted its axis. However, Turkey's policy should be evaluated not as an axis shift, but as the intersection of state identity and national identity. The definition of *"axis shift"* in the field of international relations refers to the transition to a different approach by breaking away from the classical foreign policy. Despite the criticisms from European countries, Turkey's foreign policy has not changed. The criticisms against Turkey's foreign policy vision stemmed from the development of relations with neighbouring countries outside the traditional foreign policy parameters rather than a Western-centred foreign policy.

Criticism of Turkey's foreign policy can be evaluated from diplomatic and sociological perspectives. First of all, it should be emphasised that Turkey has not severed its relations with the European Union (EU), the United States and NATO; on the contrary, it continues its full membership negotiations with the EU. It does not ignore Western values such as human rights and freedom. Turkey's foreign policy has expanded to include different actors while maintaining its traditional ties.

The signing on 30 March 1940 of the "*Treaty of Good Neighbourliness and Friendship between Turkey and Syria*" and the development of relations since then has been one of

the starting points for criticising the change in Turkey's foreign policy. During the Cold War, diplomatic relations between Syria and Turkey were almost severed. Relations with Syria reached the level of hostility due to the PKK-Syria relationship. This situation changed positively with the Adana Memorandum. Relations were maintained harmoniously until the Arab Spring brought about an unexpected situation. Prime Minister Erdoğan, speaking on behalf of Turkey, which was criticised for improving its relations with Syria and changing its axis, stated that he believed that the relations that had deteriorated in recent years were wrong and that they wanted to end the tension between the two countries. He emphasised that the conflicts emerging in the world and those that may emerge in the future cannot be prevented by classical state-centred politics.

Today, the balance of power policy is no longer centred on the state, but on an international politics in which NGOs, the business world and the media play an important role in the emergence and resolution of urgent problems. For this reason, Turkey has also made some changes in its foreign policy. For example, there has been a tendency to mobilise state institutions and organisations to make the best use of soft power (Duran, 2009). Joseph Nye's concept of soft power can be defined as the ability to achieve what it wants by using a combination of elements of attraction without threat or deception. According to this concept, a country should use its charm to achieve its foreign policy objectives without coercing the actors in the international system.

Joseph Nye drew some conclusions comparing soft power with hard power. Both are different forms of the ability to achieve goals by influencing the attitudes of others. While hard power uses economic and military force, soft power uses charm and cohesion. However, it was stated that only soft power should come into play in ensuring peace and healing the wounds of war. While the ideal sources of hard power are elements such as pressure, sanction, coercion, threat and power, the sources

of soft power include the ability to attract different actors such as values, culture, politics, etc. (Çavuş, 2012).

Turkey's universal cultural and historical values are seen as a source of soft power. Turkey has supported its existing influence in the Middle East with soft power derived from its economic and military power.

Since its foundation, the Republic of Turkey has adopted democracy and secularism as the core values of its culture. Therefore, Turkey's image on the global stage is different from other Islamic countries. Having these universal values, Turkey has also attracted the attention of neighbouring countries and societies. Turkey has pursued a policy that overlaps with these values by disregarding the values of the common culture. With this approach, it has increased its effectiveness on the international stage. In the process of accession to the EU, Turkey has made arrangements in many fields and tried to ensure the expansion of its soft power zone. Due to the effects of the Arab Spring in the Middle East, it is thought that Turkey has become an important player in the international arena and increased its influence as a result of its close relations with the Middle East, following urgent issues and implementing policies to ensure social order.

The Arab Spring is a process accompanied by very important events in international politics. The effects of the events that took place in this process, which started with the overthrow of governments that had been in power for many years, were felt not only in the region but also all over the world. While Turkey was developing its relations with its neighbours under the shadow of accusations of a change in its foreign policy before the Arab Spring, the parameters of its foreign policy changed with the Arab Spring (Çiçekçi, 2012).

After the Arab Spring, Turkey needed to define a new foreign policy in the region. A noteworthy difference in the understanding of leadership that emerged within this framework is the priority of winning the societies in the region instead of

the political power of states. During the Arab Spring, Turkey took steps to expand the sphere of influence of its foreign policy (Çiçekçi, 2012). The revision of Turkey's foreign policy has manifested itself in many fields, from relations with its neighbours to the debate on pivot transition, and has become a critical factor in the formation of a new national vision (Özdemir, 2017).

Turkey's stance towards the Arab Spring has been to demand the transition of the countries in the region to a democratic system and to stand by them in this regard. Within this framework, Turkey has supported the demands of the people in the region to increase freedoms through democracy. It believed that reforms in every field in these states should be carried out according to the internal dynamics of the country (Akıllı, 2012). In the first place, Turkey stated that the necessary reforms should be carried out as soon as possible, especially regarding the political authorities in Libya and Syria. The Arab Spring process was a period in which Turkey had to make and implement important decisions.

In Libya, the Arab Spring soon turned into a civil war. When Western countries decided to intervene militarily in Libya, Turkey was the first to react. Turkey stated that this was the West's attitude towards Libya's oil reserves. Turkey has put forward its humanitarian approach to the issue and declared that it was against foreign intervention (Oran, 2013). Although the Arab League and the UN Security Council forced Turkey to change its approach with resolutions paving the way for military intervention, Ankara initially tried to reconcile the regime and its opponents. However, when there was no more room for the current regime to function, Turkey started to argue that Gaddafi should leave office as soon as possible (Oran, 2013).

In the process in Libya in August 2011, the opponents of the regime were victorious. Afterwards, Turkey paid visits to Arab countries with changing governments in order to strengthen its relations with them. Agreements were signed with these

countries in various fields. During his visits to Tunisia, Egypt and North Africa, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan emphasised the importance of secularism and democracy, and used Turkey as an example.

Turkey-Egypt relations reached their peak during the reign of Mohamed Morsi, who was elected by the Muslim Brotherhood. In this process, a number of commercial business partnerships were established. Egypt has been one of the most important allies of Turkey in the region especially since 2012. In the same year, 27 different partnerships and 2 billion dollar loan agreements were signed between the two countries (Balcı, 2013). However, when Morsi was ousted from power by a military coup in 2013, relations between the two countries started to break down. Prime Minister Erdoğan reacted to the overthrow of the elected President and condemned the coup.

The Arab Spring, which erupted in Syria in March 2011, significantly affected Syria-Turkey relations. What distinguishes Syria from other Arab Spring countries is its border with Turkey. Therefore, Turkey was more concerned and affected by the developments in Syria. Turkey called on the Assad regime to carry out democratic reforms and stated that the voice of the Syrian people should be heard. However, the unpreventable violence in Syria has increased day by day. People fleeing from the violence started to seek refuge in Turkey. The arrival of a large number of migrants in a short time increased the tension between the two countries. Erdoğan stated that the events in Syria were Turkey's internal problem and that his patience with the Assad regime was running out. However, Syria did not respond to Turkey's calls. After that, Ankara, in co-operation with the West and the Arab League countries, initiated a more specific policy against Assad (Oran, 2013). Turkey closely monitored the political process and tried to increase its control in Syria. It also supported the Arab League's decision to sanction Syria.

The fact that Syria is a trade base in the Middle East increases its geopolitical value. Turkey-Syria relations, which were in their golden period before the Arab Spring affected Syria, started to deteriorate day by day. Faced with an influx of refugees, Turkey expressed the need to create a buffer zone on the border. It also made a proposal to declare a no-fly zone. However, these demands were not supported by the international community.

Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar opposed Assad, while Russia and Iran did not want a regime change and Turkey had difficulty in implementing this policy. The downing of a Turkish aircraft in Syria in 2012, followed by the killing of many Turkish citizens by bombs dropped from Syria in southern Turkey, further strained Turkey-Syria relations.

After the Arab Spring spread to Syria, relations between Turkey and Iran started to deteriorate. The tension between Turkey and Iran, which indirectly intervened in the events in Syria, was also reflected in regional events. Iran wanted to maintain and expand its influence in the region. Therefore, it has pursued interventionist policies in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and the Persian Gulf region. Tired of Iran's attempts to dominate the region, Turkey has taken a stand against Iran while supporting Lebanon, Yemen and Saudi Arabia (İnat, 2016). However, recent developments in Syria and Iraq have forced Turkey and Iran to negotiate. The strong historical ties and existing economic relations between the two countries have led Turkey and Iran to re-evaluate their relations.

Iraq-Turkey relations became multilateral after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Northern Iraq moved away from the central administration of Baghdad. The terrorist environment that started with the invasion of Iraq led to the emergence of the globally terrorist IŞİD. IŞİD, which has gained strength in Syria and Iraq, has become an element that our country should take into account in its regional politics.

In the Ankara Treaty signed with France in 1921, both parties agreed that the land of the Suleyman Shah tomb belonged to our country and that Turkish troops would protect the tomb. In 1973, the tomb was moved to an area near the Euphrates River due to the flood threat posed by the dam that was started to be constructed near the Suleyman Shah tomb. In 2014, as IŞİD expanded its dominance in the region, Turkey strengthened its military presence there. In the event of an attack, Turkey stated that the necessary intervention would be made. As the threat continued, the Turkish army moved the tomb of Suleiman Shah to the village of Eshme on the Syrian border, close to the Turkish border, in an operation in early 2015.

At this stage, IŞİD/DAESH invaded Mosul, besieged the Turkish consulate in Mosul and held 48 people hostage for three months. In addition, there were occasional armed and bomb attacks against the Turkish army on the Syrian border. In 2014, the US tried to cooperate with various forces against DAESH. Turkey was one of the first countries to declare DAESH a terrorist organisation. Turkey joined the coalition of air strikes against DAESH and opened the Incirlik base for the use of coalition aircraft.

The coup in Egypt and Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood brought Qatar and Turkey closer. According to the agreement signed between the two countries, Turkey established a military base in Qatar. Qatar thought that this agreement with Turkey would maintain the balance against the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

Turkey-Middle East relations from past to present

The Middle East was a place where peace and justice prevailed for about 400 years under the Ottoman rule. Geographical security and peace disappeared due to the destructive movements that emerged as a result of the nationalist movement that accelerated in the XIXth century. The acceleration of colonialist policies in the 19th century led to the destruction of the socio-cultural and political structure

of the Middle East (Bilgin, 2016). The Middle East has always been a target of the West due to its geostrategic value and its richness in terms of raw materials and natural resources.

In 1914, the Ottoman Empire entered the First World War, and the Ottoman territories became a colonial target of the Entente States. The most important document of the secret partition projects is the Sykes-Picot Agreement, whose influence on the events in the Middle East continues today. This treaty is the geographical map of the Middle East. The Treaty of Constantinople, which preceded the Sykes-Picot Agreement, was also an agreement in which the lands of the Ottoman Empire were divided between Russia, France and Britain. Another treaty affecting the Middle East region is the McMahon Treaty. This treaty was signed between Britain and Sharif Hussein. Sharif Hussein was promised a kingdom extending from Mersin to Yemen. Hussein, who was the Emir of the Ottoman Empire for many years, co-operated with Britain and shot the Ottoman Empire in the back. The agreements made between the Entente states during the First World War were called "*secret agreements*". After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Russia leaked the secret agreements (Emirhanoğlu, 2018). Another document that influenced the Middle East was the Balfour Declaration. With this document, the Jews came closer to their goal of establishing a homeland in what they called the "*Promised Land*". The Arabs sided with the Western powers in the struggle against the British and French armies of the Ottoman Empire.

Founded in 1923, the main principle of the Republic of Turkey's foreign policy since its foundation has been Westernism against the status quo. Status quoism is a continuation of the statist tradition and aims to protect and maintain borders. Westernism expressed an attitude towards European science and technology rather than a geographical region. Turkey pursued an independent and peaceful foreign policy and tried to implement this policy in its domestic

politics. The Republic of Turkey, which fought for and won its independence, became an example for the colonised countries struggling for independence.

1923-1945 period

It is claimed that the Republic of Turkey has deliberately severed its ties with Middle Eastern countries in the years since its foundation. This is not an accurate assessment of Turkey's Middle East policy in the 1920s and 1930s. On the contrary, during this period, Turkey tried to solve the Mosul problem, the Hatay problem and other problems with an active policy. One of the most important issues after the Treaty of Lausanne was the Mosul issue. Britain occupied Mosul in accordance with Article 7 of the Armistice of Armistice of Mudros, and Turkey opposed the return of the region, which was included in the Misak-ı Milli. However, when the negotiations failed, the issue was referred to the League of Nations in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne. At that time, Turkey was not yet a member of the League of Nations and the League of Nations was dominated by Britain.

Turkey wanted to hold a plebiscite in Mosul, but the UK rejected this, claiming that the people of the region were illiterate. While the situation was being discussed in Geneva, Turkish troops started to clash with the British in Mosul. Meanwhile, Britain started the Nestorian and Sheikh Sait revolts.

Italy's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 mobilised regional and global action. The Baghdad Agreement was signed between Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan on 8 July 1937.

The Hatay problem and the Turkish-French debt problem were among the problems that emerged during this period. The borders of Hatay were determined by the Ankara Agreement during the period of national struggle. France adhered to the agreement and Hatay was included in our country in July 1939.

On 2 August 1926, the Turkish-flagged ship "Bozkurt" and the French-flagged ship "Lotus" collided in Midilli Island waters. The collision resulted in the sinking of a Turkish-flagged ship and the death of 8 Turks. When the French-flagged ship arrived in Istanbul, the Turkish court sentenced the captain of the ship, Demos, to imprisonment and although France requested his release, the Turkish court rejected the request of the French government. Therefore, the French media started to give negative news about Turkey. As a result, the Bozkurt and Lotus case was brought to the International Court of Justice, and Turkey won a legal victory at the international level with the decision announced in favour of Turkey in 1927.

Another problem between France and Turkey was related to the French missionary schools in Turkey. Although the Turks wanted Turkish teachers to teach history and geography lessons in Turkish in these educational institutions, France objected to this. The problem was solved in favour of our country. Turkey has always emphasised the maintenance of good relations with Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Egypt, etc. in order to maintain a balance with influential countries in the region such as Russia and Britain and to ensure stability in the region.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was the first statesman in the history of the modern Middle East to try to implement a strategy for regional stability. One of the important events indicating this is the Sadabad Treaty. Atatürk thought that the only way to be effective in international politics was to become a regional power and only in this way could he develop a sense of equality in his relations with Europe.

One of the important events in Turkey's foreign policy during this period was the membership of the League of Nations. After the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany and the economic crisis, our country became a member of the League of Nations. Due to the Mosul problem with Britain, Turkey changed its attitude towards joining the League of Nations.

When the issue of membership came to the agenda, Mustafa Kemal wanted to be invited instead of applying in person. In 1932, with the proposal of the Spanish representative, Turkey's membership was accepted (Oran, 2005).

At this stage, another significant event in Turkey's foreign policy is the Montreux Straits Treaty. Turkey has expressed its intention to amend the provisions of the Lausanne Treaty regarding the straits on every occasion. On April 10, 1936, Turkey sent a note to the parties for an international meeting. Western countries, except Italy and Germany, responded positively to the note. On July 20, 1936, Turkey, Russia, England, France, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Japan signed the Montreux Straits Treaty. With this treaty, there have been changes in the straits regime.

Post-World War II Era

After the Second World War, the United States, China, the Soviet Union, France, and Great Britain, as the Allies of World War II, emerged victorious over Japan and Germany. The international system underwent profound changes after the war. Following World War II, Turkey experienced significant changes in its domestic and foreign policies. A distinguishing feature of Turkish foreign policy during this period was its integration with Europe (Sander, 2006). The influence of England and France in the international system diminished after World War II, while the dominance of the United States and the Soviet Union was felt. Within this framework, the Cold War began in global politics with a bipolar regime.

During and after the war, the Yalta and Potsdam conferences were important in terms of changing the global system. At the Yalta Conference in 1945, world powers made decisions that altered the global system. There was a change in international leaders between the Yalta Conference and the Potsdam Conference. President Roosevelt of the United States had passed away, and Truman took his place. In the UK, Prime

Minister Churchill lost the election, and Labour Party leader Clement Attlee took over. One of the most critical issues at the Potsdam Conference was Germany. It was decided at the conference that Germany should transition to a democratic system and that war criminals should be brought to justice. However, due to different interpretations of democracy by the parties, Germany was divided into East and West.

One of the key issues in the global political agenda after the war was the disagreement between the United States and the Soviet Union over nuclear weapons. The US wanted to prevent the Soviet Union and other countries from acquiring nuclear weapons (Sander, 2006). In 1945, the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission was established, and under America's guidance, it gathered to negotiate the ban on nuclear weapons. Despite the efforts of the Commission, it did not last long and ended in 1948. Despite the United States' attempts to prevent it, the Soviet Union continued testing nuclear weapons.

The division of Germany into East and West is one of the most important events in evaluating the outcome of the war for Europe. The Soviet Union responded to changes in the regional currency system controlled by the UK, the US, and Germany and imposed a blockade on Berlin (Erhan, 1996).

West Germany was established in 1949 by surpassing the embargo imposed by the Soviets. In this context, the USSR declared the establishment of the German Democratic Republic on the occupied territories of East Germany.

Another significant change in post-World War II Europe occurred in Britain. During the war, Prime Minister Churchill lost the election in 1945, and was succeeded by the Labour Party leader Clement Attlee. The British implemented economic reforms after the war. Attlee reduced the country's expenditures under two reform policies and granted independence to its former colonies. Additionally, they received economic support from the United States. The British lost their previous influence in the global system.

After the Second World War, the National Unity Commission was established in France. Despite being one of the victorious Allies in the war, France's economy was devastated. High energy demand, but insufficient energy supply, led to serious problems. Energy shortages caused factories to become inoperable, leading to increased unemployment and inflation. These issues, like in other European countries, strengthened socialist parties supported by the USSR in France.

Italy, after World War II, became one of the economically struggling states in Europe. Despite switching sides before the end of the war, its economy collapsed, and its heavy industry faced the threat of almost disappearing. Just like in France, unemployment emerged in Italy, leading to socialists coming into power (Erhan, 1996).

The United Nations was established in 1945. Europe was divided into two poles, with the United States on one side and the Soviet Union on the other. The Soviet Union began to gain military and industrial superiority. The only country capable of standing against the Soviet Union was the United States of America.

The Soviet Union made efforts to increase the number of allied states after the war. In addition to influencing Central Europe, they sought to increase their influence in our country and Iran. The expansionist policies of the Soviets not only worried the United States but also Western European countries, leading to a change in US policy (Giritli, 2011).

Following World War II, the influence of France and England decreased in the Middle East, while the influence of the US and the Soviet Union increased. The Middle East has been one of the regions where the power struggle of the bipolar system has been most intense. Turkey joined the Western bloc due to the Soviet threat (Erol ve Ozan, 2011). The increased polarization forced our country to cooperate with Europe against the Soviet Union (Yentürk, 2016). As a result of events

in the Middle East, Turkey's foreign policy brought it closer to Western countries and away from Arab nations.

After World War II, it was expected for Turkey to establish good relations with newly independent countries, but the opposite occurred. Misuse of Westernization in Turkish foreign policy in the 1950s led to Turkey's distancing from the Middle East and its ineffectiveness in the region. During this period, Turkey pursued a unilateral policy and was seen as the representative of the West in the region.

After World War II, the importance of Palestine in the Middle East increased. In 1947, Turkey collaborated with Arab countries at the UN regarding Palestine. However, Turkey became the first Muslim country to recognize Israel in 1949 at the UN, a decision criticized by Egypt and Syria (Fırat, 2009).

Turkey's membership in NATO in 1952 and the power shift resulting from the Free Officers' coup in Egypt led to significant changes in foreign policy, directly impacting Middle East politics. Turkey supported Western countries' policies in the Middle East after joining NATO. In the 1950s, decision-makers from the Democratic Party aligned with the US in the Middle East, while Syria viewed Turkey's alignment with Western countries as a threat, leading to closer ties with the Soviet Union, which concerned Turkey.

Turkey began bilateral negotiations with Iraq in 1954. As a result of the development of relations with Iraq, in 1955, the two countries signed the Agreement on Security and Defence Cooperation, which constituted the core of the Baghdad Pact, and then Britain, Pakistan, Iran and the Baghdad Pact between these five countries. Turkey, politically successful, later attempted to include Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria in the Baghdad Pact but was unsuccessful. Particularly, Ankara's bilateral relations with Syria have influenced other countries and rendered the negotiations ineffective (Çetinkaya, 2016).

Egypt influenced Syria's foreign policy and improved its relations with the Soviets by taking a stance against the

Baghdad Pact. In 1956, Baas politics began to dominate the Middle East, including enhancing relations with the Soviet Union. Intensification of relations between Egypt and the USSR started. Israel, describing the Baghdad Pact as a coalition built against it, expressed its dissatisfaction. In this context, the Baghdad Pact brought about a geographical polarization in the Middle East. Syria, Egypt, Israel, and the Soviets formed a front against the Baghdad Pact. Although the U.S. did not become a party to the agreement, it supported the pact. The Baghdad Pact led to the fragmentation rather than the unification of Middle Eastern countries, greatly affecting Turkey. Relations between Arab countries and the Soviets intensified after the Baghdad Pact was signed (Bostani, 2013). A crisis arose regarding the Suez Canal after the signing of the Baghdad Pact. This incident further influenced Egypt's stance towards Europe. The United States and Britain canceled their aid to Egypt for the construction of the Aswan Dam. In return, in 1956, Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal.

When the Suez Crisis erupted in the Middle East, Egypt had good relations with the Soviets. The USSR supported Syria and Egypt economically and militarily, which alarmed Turkey. Turkey, along with the US, was the first country to condemn Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal. As the crisis in the Middle East escalated, the parties become more militarily involved. Egypt openly expressed its discomfort with Turkey's Western position. While Turkey generally supported Western countries in politics, it sided against Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Since the 1950s, Syria has been one of the countries experiencing a crisis in its relations with Turkey. Turkey's accession to the Baghdad Pact caused tension between the two countries. The close relationship between Syria and the USSR further escalated the tension. A crisis arose between the two countries when the Soviet Union signed an agreement to provide economic and military aid to Syria.

Syria has appointed El Bizri, a pro-Soviet communist, as the Chief of General Staff. This move has caused concern for America, Jordan, and Turkey. The United States has stated that it would provide military assistance to Turkey or any other country in the event of an attack. Turkey has increased military training and started exercises along the Syrian border. Due to tensions at the border crossing, Syria has informed the United Nations that Turkey is under threat and has therefore mobilized (Zeyrek and Akman, 2015). Syria, which has received support from the Soviets against Turkey, rejected the UN's mediation offer. Subsequently, bilateral talks began between Syria and Turkey, and a third UN mediation offer was positively received. After the talks, Syria withdrew its complaint from the UN. In response, Turkey withdrew its military forces sent to the Syrian border. The crisis between the two countries has ended, and relations have improved.

Turkey's foreign policy, especially starting from the 1960s, began to clash with Western policies. The US did not support our country on the Cyprus issue. When Süleyman Demirel came to power in the 1965 elections, he claimed that relations with the West were isolating Turkey and that confidence in Europe was lost. He announced that he would pursue a strong foreign policy during this period. The first response came from Iraq. Iraq declared that it would support and defend Turkey on the international stage regarding the Cyprus issue.

After the visits to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia, our country has improved its relations with Arab countries. During the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Turkey declared that it would not allow its military bases to be used against Arab countries in order to prevent the aid provided by the US to Israel. In a UN vote in favor of Arab states, Turkey supported the Arab states and emphasized the right of Palestine to establish an independent state (Sinkaya, 2011). Turkey began to prefer a multilateral foreign policy approach to normalize relations with neighboring countries, especially Arab countries (Çetinkaya, 2006).

Following the occupation of Jerusalem after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, efforts were made to establish the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 1969 in response to the turmoil at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Cooperation with predominantly Muslim countries has always been an important part of Turkey's foreign policy. Turkey's participation in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation was a significant step towards closer relations with Arab countries. Additionally, before the war broke out, Turkey announced that it would support Arab countries in the field of diplomatic relations. Turkey supported Arab countries and did not allow the US to use the Incirlik Air Base.

Turkey's relations with countries in the Middle East other than Israel have developed since 1973. The declaration of Jerusalem as the capital by Israel in 1980 further strained the already poor relations between Turkey and Israel. Turkey stated that it would not accept this decision. Turkey's good relations with Arab countries have also improved in the field of trade (Gönlübol, 1989). Conversely, Iran's relations with America have increased, leading Iran to become part of the Western alliance. Turkey has sought to enhance its relations with Iran and has continued to do so after the oil crisis (Çetinkaya, 2006).

The Camp David Accords signed on September 17, 1978, marked a new phase in Middle Eastern politics and influenced Turkey. In the 1980s, there were incidents of terrorism and water disputes between Turkey and Syria. During this time, Turkey began the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) and tensions escalated. Turkey clearly stated that it was necessary for Syria to stop supporting illegal terrorist organizations.

In the 1990s, Turkey-Israel relations improved, leading to the signing of a Security Treaty between the two countries. The rise of the Refah Party to power in 1995 brought Turkish-Israeli relations to a new level. Necmettin Erbakan, leader of the Welfare Party, aimed to improve relations with Islamic countries as part of his election campaign. He expressed his desire to shift Turkey's foreign policy focus to the Middle East

and make Turkey a leading country in the region. Erbakan made his first visits to Libya and Iran. In the 1990s, he attempted to address the country's terrorism problem in order to be influential in both foreign and domestic policies, but he did not receive support from the West.

Post-Cold War period

After the end of the Cold War, the balance in the global system shifted with the perception of security changing. The global system evolved into a unipolar structure where America became the sole superpower. While some feared that this change would increase chaos, others believed that stability and peace would be ensured under a single superpower. Ongoing issues in the Middle East, instability in Central Asia and the Caucasus show chaos prevailing over order. Participants' responses to the challenges facing international politics are beginning to reveal the new structure of the international system. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, threatened the energy interests of the US and the West in the Persian Gulf. Many believe that the policies of the US have strengthened its position as the sole superpower (Gözen, 2014).

After the Gulf War, the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina came to the forefront, solidifying the US position as the sole superpower on the global stage. Initially seen as Europe's internal matter, the US did not intervene in the Bosnia and Herzegovina issue. However, when European countries failed to solve the problem, America intervened and played an active role. Another event that showcased America's active role after the end of the Cold War was the Kosovo crisis. America intervened in Kosovo as it did in Bosnia to resolve the issue. NATO, under US leadership, played a crucial role in resolving the problem.

After the Cold War, NATO continued to be the most important international political security organization. Established in 1949 to address the communist threat posed by the Soviet

Union after the end of World War II, NATO's formation was no longer driven by the most influential factor following the end of the Cold War and the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the stage of history. As a result, NATO decided to change its founding objectives. While originally a defense organization, NATO has also taken on a security role (Oğuzlu, 2012). After the end of the Cold War, NATO successively reached agreements with former Cold War enemies. However, Russia's non-membership in NATO and lack of cooperation with China have led to the organization being defined by American and EU members as a means of using force (Özlük, 2014).

After the Cold War, the United Nations needs to be thoroughly researched and evaluated. After World War II, the UN failed to maintain stability on the international stage during times of peace between wars. Founded under the leadership of victorious nations from World War II, the UN's role was not very effective during the regional and bipolar conflicts of the Cold War. However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s led to the collapse of the bipolar structure and the transition to a unipolar order, creating different security threats and increasing the authority of the United Nations.

In a globalized world, various threats make it impossible for countries to deal with them alone. It is believed that the UN should play an important role in this context. However, the ability of the UN to fulfill this role is debatable. Despite the increase in the number of member states, the Security Council has been criticized for not changing its veto powers. In short, the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union brought dramatic changes to the international system. The global system has evolved from a bipolar system to a unipolar system. After the Gulf War, crises in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo transitioned to a unipolar structure, but the events of 9/11 showed that this was changing. Due to the importance of the concept of asymmetric warfare and collective security following the 9/11 attacks, it is believed that

international organizations need to be reformed. Furthermore, the resurgence of Russia, the participation of multinational corporations in the economy, and China and Japan becoming more active participants in global politics are indicators that the global system is progressing towards a multipolar system (Şahbaz, 2018).

The 9/11 attacks are considered to have changed the destiny of the Middle East. American President George W. Bush initiated an invasion of Iraq. The US accuses Iraq of possessing chemical weapons and supporting terrorism. It is understood that these accusations are aimed at justifying the invasion of Iraq (Türkmen, 2010).

Turkey grappled with major foreign policy issues in the 2000s. One of the most critical issues affecting Turkey's Middle East policy was the US invasion of Iraq. Ankara should have played a more active role in the critical situation of its neighbor. Turkey closely monitored the process to ensure its border security and Iraq's stability. The proposal presented to the Turkish Grand National Assembly on On 1 March, the resolution submitted to Parliament was rejected by a minority vote.

In the 2000s, one of the most important issues of foreign policy was relations with Middle Eastern countries. Turkish officials visited the countries in the region to ensure peace and tranquillity in the Middle East. Our country has adopted a proactive diplomatic approach to create peace in the region. In 2003, a peace program was organized in Istanbul with the participation of ministers from many countries to prevent the US invasion of Iraq (Ulus, 2015).

Despite all efforts, America did not back down from its decision and was ready for war. America demanded two things from Ankara. First, to use Turkish ports and air bases for operations planned to Northern Iraq, and second, to send troops to Northern Iraq through Turkey. However, according to the resolution presented to the Turkish Grand National Assembly

on March 1st, these demands of the USA were not accepted. This decision of the Turkish Grand National Assembly strained the relationship between America and our country (Türkmen, 2010).

The instability in the region after the invasion of Iraq dealt a heavy blow to the American forces in the region. The occupation of Iraq by America disrupted regional balances, weakened and destabilized Iraq, and increased Iran's influence. Additionally, radical organizations have strengthened in Iraq.

Turkey's Middle East policy after September 11th.

After the invasion of Iraq, Turkey emphasized the peaceful resolution of the issue and the development of relations with regional countries. After the American invasion of Iraq, security issues arose that could pose serious problems for the foreign policy of our country.One important aspect of Turkey's Middle East policy after the invasion of Iraq was to maintain good relations with people of different religious identities (Emirhanoğlu, 2018).

In the 2000s, security played a significant role in Turkey's Middle East policy, prompting a reassessment of its foreign policy, particularly in the face of new problems that Western countries did not view from the same perspective. It is important that Turkey resolved its trust problem with Syria until 2010, when the Arab Spring took effect, and then tried to improve its bilateral relations with Iran, Syria and Iraq. Turkey demonstrated a constructive stance in the Middle East, which reflected in economic and political spheres, strengthening trade relations with regional countries (Şahin, 2010). The positive relations with the EU improved the perception of Turkey by regional countries. Therefore, we have cooperated with many regional countries in various areas of security in foreign policy. Turkey's foreign policy has been reformed with some principles like soft power, and an active policy has emerged in world politics (Turan and Karanfil, 2017).

Examining the Relations Between Turkey and the Iraqi Regional Kurdish Administration in the Context of Post-Arab Spring Foreign Policy.

Brief Description and Scope of the Geography of the Middle East

The concept of the "Middle East Region" is a region that is still being studied today conceptually, and the debate over what areas the region includes is also controversial. The main reason for the debate over the term "*Middle East*" is its political nature. In fact, the concept is not regional, but external in origin and has been used to refer to a limited region for specific interests. This concept was first used in 1902 by American naval historian and strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan to describe the region between Arabia and India. It is important to remember that the years when the concept was first used were also the years when empires were starting to fall worldwide (Çelik, 2005). After Mahan, the concept was written by several British and US authors. Another point that should not be forgotten is that the years when the concept began to be used were the years when empires around the world began to collapse. Particularly aggressive and internally interventionist countries like England and Russia intervened in the region after the weakening of the Ottoman Empire. They attempted to establish great dominance in the geography of the Middle East.

Alternative imperialist concepts have been prepared for intervention in the region to be called the "*Eastern issue*" against Russian imperialism. Although the concept of the Middle East is generally criticized by many international relations authors, it is widely accepted that the concept is the result of a Western-centered and subjective understanding, just like the concept of Orientalism. Bernard Lewis, defining the concepts of Anatolia, Asia, and the Middle East, explained this reality as follows. The name "Anatolia" comes from the Greek word meaning the same as the Italian Levant and the Latin "East" (sunrise). These names reflect the views of people trapped in the eastern part of

the Mediterranean, the known world for them. Subsequently, the "Mediterranean" peoples learned that it was a much larger gave it the name "Asia Minor." Similarly, centuries later, when the more distant East appeared on the western horizon, the East that they had known for a long time began to be known as the Near East and then the Middle East (Lewis, 2013).

When we talk about the western horizon as Lewis points out, we can understand the perspective of the British who were actually the most important power in Europe at that time. Believing that Europe was the center of the world, the British felt the need to name other regions of the world based on their geographical locations. In other words, Central Europe is classified as Near Central Europe and Far from Central Europe. The renowned historian Edward Said examines in detail how Western and other travelers defined the region and their perspectives on geography during their visits in his book Orientalism. The concept of the Middle East is a relative term produced by Europe, it has no objective reality, places itself at the center of the world, and names the other regions accordingly (Said, 2003). Said claims that Middle Eastern societies quickly adopted European culture, meaning their way of life is not entirely their own but influenced by external traditions and customs. Indeed, under the rule of Riza Pahlavi, countries such as Iran, present-day Turkey, Tunisia, and the Kurdish region of Iraq have clearly felt this characteristic.

European clothing, appearance, attitudes, and behaviors are largely of European origin. In contrast, changes in the Middle East come from a society and culture completely different from the region's traditions (Lewis, 2013). While Lewis' ideas may be exaggerated, they are not entirely incorrect. Compared to Western societies, the Middle East lags behind in various areas such as education, social structure, gender equality, and respect for human rights. Their efforts to emulate similar governance and clothing styles as more advanced Western societies stem from a desire to keep up with the evolving world. It is an

undeniable reality that societies aspiring for development benefit in some way from Western societies.

The Middle East region is generally defined broadly and narrowly. A broad definition of the Middle East includes 22 countries spanning from Morocco in the west to Pakistan in the east, including the Central Asian Republics, Turkey in the north to Yemen in the south. Specifically, except for Palestine, the Middle East includes a region of 13 states from Egypt in the east to Afghanistan in the north, Turkey in the north, and Yemen in the south (Idrisoğlu, 2010).

History of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq

What is the structure of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq? Various articles, reviews, and theses written in our country about the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq are categorized as Regions, Northern Iraq, Iraq Regional Government, Northern Iraq Regional Kurdish Administration, or Southern Kurdistan. The authors' approaches to these concepts and the studies conducted on these concepts reflect their own opinions.

Barzani Uprisings in British-Controlled Iraq

Following the weakening of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East, various colonial powers such as Britain, France, and Russia intervened in the region. After World War I, the British and French secretly agreed to create artificial borders in the Middle East, disregarding cultural values. In other words, the geography was shaped by imperialist interests due to the weakening and eventual disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. In 1918, Britain took control of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul following the Ottoman Empire's collapse. After the Ankara Agreement with France, these three provinces were united under Iraq's authority (Arı, 2015).

Like other Arab countries, Iraq also exhibits ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. While the region is predominantly Arab, Kurds and Turkmens also reside there. Seeking to maintain

control over their country in such a diverse geographical location, the British made a deal with the Arabs, resulting in a state with internal freedom but external dependence on Britain (Arı, 2015). This allowed Iraq to be free to act independently when dealing with suppressing Kurdish uprisings or negotiating with the Kurds. Due to seeing the uprising as contrary to their interests, Britain consistently supported the Iraqi government (Mcdowall, 2004). One of the main reasons the British opposed "*Kurdish autonomy*" was the possibility of Iraqi Kurds joining forces with Iranian Kurds, leading to Soviet control and potential Soviet entry into the region via Iraqi Kurds.

During a period when the Ottoman Empire was weak, the Iraqi Kurds, under the leadership of Sheikh Abdulsalam Barzani, rebelled in 1908. With the support of Western powers, the uprising was suppressed in 1914 (Xemgin, 2013). During the years when Iraq was under British mandate, excluding the rebellion led by Sheikh Mahmud Barzani against the British in 1919, we can talk about two critical uprising movements. The first one is the rebellion of Sheikh Ahmed Barzani in 1931-1932. The other rebellion is the uprising of Molla Mustafa Barzani in 1943-1945 (Mcdowall, 2004). The formation process of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government matured after the struggle of the Barzanis, one of the most important Kurdish tribes in Iraq, residing in the Barzan region. In 1931-1932, the Kurds rebelled against Iraq and proved to the British, who supported the Iraqi government for their own interests at the time, that the Barzanis had the power to oppose the government. However, the uprising was suppressed by the Iraqi government forces, and the Barzan leaders were sent into exile from the Barzan region. British support for the Iraqi government continued until the Second World War.

During World War II, Britain did not have time to deal with the Kurds. Like other Allies, the British were worried about how to stop the German advance. Seizing this opportunity, Barzani initiated a new approach against the Iraqi government,

which did not receive sufficient British support. Molla Mustafa Barzani, whose star was rising at the time, came from exile in the city of Sulaymaniyah to the Barzan region to begin restructuring. His offers to the Iraqi government were not met with a positive response. Consequently, Mustafa Barzani first sought support from other Kurdish tribes in the fight against the government. According to Mesut Barzani, his father received support from many Kurdish tribes. With this support, Barzani will inflict significant losses on the Iraqi government in his struggle and push the government towards the idea of a resolution and dialogue. Following the uprising led by Barzani from 1943 to 1945, the Baghdad government under Prime Minister Nuri al-Said conveyed through a government official that they were ready to negotiate with Barzani (Barzani, 2017).

The British government has also supported the Baghdad government in negotiations. The British have aimed to temporarily prevent the Kurdish uprising in the region through this dialogue process. Therefore, British officials have welcomed the call for dialogue. As a result of the negotiations, Nuri Said has pledged to control a large part of the region where the existing Regional Kurdish Administration of Iraq dominates. However, when the Nuri Said government ended, the government of Hamdi Paçacı, who took over, did not recognize Kurdish demands and resumed armed struggle. The pressures of the British army on the Kurds who tried to rebel after World War II showed that the desire for dialogue in the region was a short-term strategic decision (Barzani, 2017). Molla Mustafa Barzani, foreseeing that the new government would not bring a solution, interacted closely with the Kurds in the Soviet Union to seek refuge against possible attacks (Barzani, 2017). The Iraqi government launched a massive attack against the Kurds, causing thousands of Kurds to flee to the Iranian border. Molla Mustafa Barzani, along with the peshmerga, worked for the interests of the Mahabad Kurdish Republic established in Iran by going there.

Formation Process of IKBY after the Fall of the Iraqi Monarchy Regime

In addition to military pressure towards Iraq, discriminatory policies in education and healthcare have had irreversible consequences on the Kurds. Therefore, it is evident that the Kurds will support any type of coup against the Iraqi government to overthrow the regime that oppresses them. Aware of this situation, General Abdul Karim Qasim, with the necessary external support and cooperation with the Kurds internally, came to power through a bloody coup on July 14, 1958, overthrowing the monarchy regime in Iraq (Çakmak, 2012).

Upon taking power, General Qasim declared that he would address the Kurds' demands and recognize their rights in return for the support they provided (Barzani, 2017; McDowall, 2004). According to Mesut Barzani, not only the Kurds but also Arabs reacted strongly against the government. *"So after the coup, Kurds and Arabs took to the streets to celebrate the fall of the kingdom"* (Barzani, 2017).

Although the 1958 Iraq Interim Constitution stated that Kurds and Arabs are equal communities within the Iraqi state framework and ensured their protection, Kurds continued to be treated as second-class citizens (Dalar, 2016). Promises made during General Qasim's presidency, similar to the Nuri Said government era, were not fulfilled, causing the process of establishing IKBY to be interrupted once again. With no more dealings with the Kurds post-revolution, General Qasim attempted to assimilate the Kurds among the Arabs, pursuing a unified Iraqi policy (Barzani, 2017).

When we look at the efforts of Kurds in Iraq to establish their legal rights, it can be said that it has been a long process where Kurds have constantly lost and been deceived. Despite all these negativities, the Barzani administration has managed to come out stronger after facing all the setbacks. Even the IKBY administration, realizing that this process could not be carried

out with General Kasım, made an agreement with the Baathists and Nasserists who were planning to overthrow General Kasım and supported the coup against him (Mcdowall, 2004). After the 1932 uprising, Molla Mustafa Barzani demanded that a portion of the oil produced in Kirkuk and Mosul be given to the IKBY, in addition to his demands (Yıldız, 2005). The Iraqi government rejected these demands, stating that these areas did not belong to the Kurds. This led the Kurds to engage in conflicts with the Baasçı and Nasırcı. In general, the historical process shows that Iraqi Kurds have always collaborated with the new administration, but when their demands are not met, they prefer to cooperate with groups opposing the government.

The legal establishment of IKBY and the years of struggle against the Baas regime

During the 1957 Suez Crisis, Egyptian leader Nasser, who successfully nationalized the Suez Canal, gained significant popularity among Arabs, but the defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War shook Nasser's reputation among the people (Arı, 2012). As Nasser lost his popularity among Arabs, the Baas began to rise. The transformation of Arab nationalism in Egypt was not limited to Egypt alone. The situation in Iraq was not much different from that of Egypt. The Baas regime manifested itself in Iraq following Egypt. By collaborating with the Kurds, the Baas regime began to rule Iraq alone through a coup in 1968 (Dalar, 2016). After coming into power, the new regime began to ignore the demands of the Kurds, just like its predecessors. Unlike the previous rulers, the regime developed different policies among the Kurds in Iraq. The regime attempted to divide and weaken the Kurds to neutralize (Dalar, 2016) their power by getting close to strong Kurdish leaders like Talabani initially, while refusing Barzani's demands.

The lack of unity among Kurds and their different attitudes towards each other have served the interests of the central government. However, during this period, the Iraqi government

had to reconcile with Barzani, who was supported by the US and Iran. Subsequently, on March 11, 1970, an autonomy agreement was signed between Iraq's then President Saddam Hussein and Mustafa Barzani (Mcdowall, 2004). This 15-point agreement contained significant privileges for the Kurds. For the first time, they secured their rights in Iraq through a treaty with the government. The contract emphasized Arab-Kurd brotherhood and a shared state concept, granting important privileges such as the development of the Kurdish region, equal distribution of oil and other revenues to the people, and payment of salaries to the Peshmerga forces. However, the agreement did not come into effect immediately.

This autonomy agreement came into effect in 1974, with the reluctance mainly stemming from the desire to incorporate Kerkük, which remains a contentious issue, into the boundaries of the autonomous state. Saddam Hussein informed the Barzani administration that he does not consider Kerkük to be part of an autonomous region, but did not receive the response he wanted (Barzani, 2017). The Barzani administration did not want to give up Kerkük. Many scholars have attributed the inability to divide Kerkük between the two sides to the region's oil reserves. The Saddam regime, consolidating its power, deviated from the 1970 agreements and made some changes over time. This situation was clearly reflected in the autonomy agreement that came into effect in 1974. There were significant differences between the autonomy law issued by the Saddam regime in 1974 and the autonomy document signed in 1970. For example, it was not specified what the status of Kirkuk would be and whether some of the revenues from oil would be given to the Kurds. The Kurds, explaining that there were significant differences between the two documents, did not want to abandon the gains they had achieved in 1970. As a result, with the support of the United States and Iran, they rebelled against the Baas regime, but the Kurdish uprising was interrupted by a change in Iran's Iraq policy. The rapprochement between Iran

and Iraq in 1973 and the rapprochement between Iraq and the USSR subjected the Barzani administration to a challenging period (Barzani, 2017).

After 1974, Iraq developed a different strategy and began to approach Iran and the Soviet Union, preventing the Kurds from receiving external support and leading to a significant defeat for them. Iraq tried to isolate the Barzani administration by making arms agreements with the Soviet Union and developing diplomatic relations with Iran. As a result of the policy of rapprochement with the Soviet Union, Iraq cooperated in the defense field. In 1972, it signed an agreement with the Soviets to purchase large quantities of arms (Barzani, 2017). Later in March 1975, as a result of an agreement with Iran, Tehran stopped supporting the Kurds. Following Iran's withdrawal of support for the Kurds, the US also withdrew its support (Dalar, 2016). This led to the realization of the Baas regime's policy of diplomatic isolation of the Kurds in the 1970s.

Providing Kurdish groups with a large number of weapons against Iraq through traditional politics did not align with Iran's regional interests. At that time, most of the weapons for the Kurds were provided by Iran, which competed with Iraq. With the cessation of Iran's aid, the Baas regime began killing Kurds and burning thousands of villages. They displaced the Kurds from areas where they were concentrated, such as Kerkük, Hanekin, Şeyhan, Zaho, and Sincar, and resettled Arabs brought from various Arab provinces. Thus, a new period of exile began for the Kurds (Dalar, 2016).

The Baas regime continued to oppress the Kurds by using chemical weapons, especially during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, when the Kurds were deprived of external support. In response, the Kurds united to form the Kurdistan Front and declared war on the Baas regime (Mcdowall, 2004). The unity of the Iraqi Kurds put pressure on the government in Baghdad. However, Baghdad, believing that it would not face any pressure from Western countries and the USSR due to its war

with Iran, did not hesitate to use all kinds of weapons against the Kurds under the name of "Enfal" (Barzani, 2017).

An unprecedented massacre occurred in Iraq between 1987-1989. Chemical weapons were used in areas heavily populated by Kurds, leading to ethnic cleansing. According to reliable sources, 150-200 thousand Kurds were killed in the Anfal attacks, nearly 400 villages were destroyed, and around 1.5 million people were displaced. 40 thousand square kilometers of the 75 thousand square kilometers of the Kurdish region were cleansed of Kurds (Dalar, 2016; Mcdowall: 2004). The continuation of the Enfal mindset led to a second Kurdish massacre, the worst of which took place in the province of Halepçe. Chemical weapons were used in Halepçe, leading to genocide against the Kurds (Mcdowall, 2004).

Following the death of Molla Mustafa Barzani, Kurds united against Saddam, but they were unable to resist Saddam Hussein's conventional and chemical weapons. After the Enfal and Halepçe massacres, Kurds entered a period of recovery and took important steps to establish the Kurdistan Regional Government in the 1990s. Moreover, from this point on, the international community began to raise its voice against the atrocities committed against the Kurds (Mcdowall, 2004). Global reactions contributed to the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

After Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, he suffered a loss of power in the Gulf War led by the United Nations against Iraq. Shiites and Kurds, tired of his oppression, stood against Saddam. On the other hand, Shia militias that had previously cooperated with Iraqi governments joined the Kurds in the uprising (Yıldız, 2005). As a result of these revolts, the Kurdistan Regional Government gained control over a vast territory, obtaining the disputed and economically lucrative regions of Duhok, Erbil, Süleymaniye, and Kerkük.

Following the Gulf crisis, the intervention of the UN Security Council through Resolution 688 in Iraq has been effective in

protecting Kurdish gains in the region. The UN has concluded that Saddam, with the support of Turkey, would continue his policy of creating a safe zone by unlawfully killing Kurds in Northern Iraq and potentially attacking Kurdish regions. President Bush announced the ban on flights south of the 36th parallel in Iraq and stated that the US would use military force if Saddam attacked areas heavily populated by Kurds (Özalp, 2005).

Kurdish refugees have returned home under US protection. Another significant aspect of Resolution 688 is that it marks the second mention of Kurds in an international document since the League of Nations' decision on Mosul in December 16, 1925. Following this resolution, the US developed a policy to protect Kurds in Iraq, playing a crucial role in the establishment of Kurdish autonomy. The Kurdistan Front met with Saddam Hussein to demand the establishment of an autonomous Kurdistan with Kerkük as its capital (Mcdowall, 2004). Despite initially appearing sympathetic to these demands, Saddam's intentions were later revealed to be deceptive towards the Kurds. Subsequently, 10 parties under the umbrella of the Kurdistan Front, including KYB (*Kürdistan Yurtseverler Birliği*, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) and KDP (*Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi*, the Kurdistan Democratic Party) made the decision to hold elections in the Kurdish region.

Nearly 1 million people voted in the elections where 11 parties and 4 leaders competed. The Kurdistan Democratic Party received 44.5% of the votes, while the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan received 43.6% of the votes. The other smaller parties did not pass the threshold (Kurubaş, 2017). Based on these results, in the 105-seat parliament, the KDP got 50 seats, the KYB got 50 seats, and the remaining 5 seats were taken by other parties. Following the formation of the cabinet on July 7th, Kurdistan was declared a federated state within Iraq in October 1992 (Dalar, 2016). The Saddam regime, reacting strongly to this decision, imposed economic sanctions on

Northern Kurdistan. It dismantled regional aid organizations, cut off aid to the region, and attempted to annex the region. Turkey and Iran reacted to the decision made by the Kurdish Federated State Assembly. The reason for Turkey and Iran's reaction was their fear that Kurds would demand autonomy in their own countries in the future.

In 1992, a coalition government was formed between the KDP and KYB, which had an equal number of seats in the IKBY Assembly. However, shortly after, internal conflict erupted between the two parties (Özalp, 2005). Likely, these conflicts between the KDP and KYB stemmed from a leadership void that hindered the Kurdish process. The leadership problem remained unresolved after the death of Molla Mustafa Barzani in 1979. Despite the United States' intervention and the signing of the "Washington Agreements" between the two groups to end internal conflicts, the situation worsened (Dalar, 2016). The US's initiative aimed to restore stability in the region. The overthrow of the Baas regime in Iraq by the US in 2003 marked a new era of power and prosperity for the Kurds.

IKBY empowerment after Saddam Hussein

As a result of the 1998 Washington Accord, which began in 1995 with the Dublin process and was mediated by the United States, the IKBY front reunited and defined itself as an autonomous country. The region was associated with the Iraqi state in the international community through participation in elections. The parliament was reinstated on 4 October 2002 after the leadership issue was resolved (Kurubaş, 2002).

The IKBYadministration spread over large areas in the form of autonomous regions before the American invasion of Iraq and after 1992, but these regions were protected by US guarantees and the "çekiç güç" deployed in Turkey, despite the unstable governance caused by the IKBY. During this period, the IKBY border extended from Hanekeen in the east of the Iran border to the Iran border from the Syria-Turkey-Iraq border

crossing in the west, excluding the entire Turkey-Iraq border, Musul, Kerkük, and Kifri regions. Kurds inhabited these areas, with the region having approximately 4 million population and covering 40,000 km² (Kurubaş, 2002).

After the 2003 intervention, different power centers emerged in Iraq. Consequently, the US, by strengthening Kurdish groups led by Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, laid the foundation for a de facto Kurdish state where the Baghdad Administration could no longer easily intervene. This move aimed to establish control over other power centers like Iran in the region through the Kurds (Karagül, 2007).

After the invasion of the region by the US following Saddam Hussein, it allowed the IKBY to work in harmony. By 2003, the IKBY had become a country with many independent state features, such as holding municipal elections in its own region, having its own army, flag, and national anthem. During this time, a new autonomous state emerged that would not easily disintegrate. The Iraqi constitution recognized the federal structure of the Kurdistan region and gave the impression that it had become permanent compared to the past. In fact, the desire for an independence referendum is not an exception to this enduring belief in self-determination.

Legal recognition of the IKBY in the light of post-2000 developments

The most important developments that led to the strengthening of the IKBY after 2000 were the Gulf crisis in 1990 and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which weakened it. The invasion of Iraq brought about numerous changes in Iraq and the Middle East. The invasion, carried out with the support of the US and the UK under the name "*Operation Iraqi Freedom*," did not face much resistance (Yıldız, 2005). One of the positive aspects of this process was undoubtedly the IKBY's consistent support for the Iraqi alliance. Shia Arabs, Turkmen, and Assyrians who did not accept the Baas regime's

oppressive policies did not react to the American invasion (Yıldız, 2005). As a result, the US encountered little resistance, allowing it to develop policies more suited to the new state structure. Following the US invasion, a special council was established to discuss the reconstruction of Iraq. Within this context, the 25 council members, taking into account the religious and identity differences in Iraq, attempted to reach a compromise. The members of the Transitional Council consisted of 13 Shia, 5 Sunni Arabs, 5 Kurds, 1 Turkmen, and 1 Assyrian. These results are indicative of the US's approach to Iraq's federal structure and its Kurdish, Shia, and Sunni-centric policy (Dalar, 2016).

Following the establishment of the interim government after the temporary council, a coalition of Kurds gained 53 seats in the Iraqi parliament, leading to Celal Talabani being elected as the President of Iraq. The leadership of the IKYB was handed over to Mesut Barzani. This scenario reduced the risk of conflict between the IKBY and KYB, allowing the Kurds to be more active in the region. Kurds who were part of the 15-member constitution drafting committee in 2005 played a significant role in safeguarding the interests of Iraqi Kurds. In the constitution adopted on October 15, 2005, it can be said that the IKBY received most of the autonomy it had demanded since 1970.

The United States's plan to establish a federal structure in Iraq was met with concern by both Shia and Sunnis, while there were fears that the Kurds' call for a confederation could lead to Iraq's division. Indeed, Turkey, Iran, and Syria expressed their opposition to the formation of a unity based on ethnic identity in Iraq in meetings held in Ankara, Tehran, and Damascus (Pirinççi, 2004). However, it wouldn't be wrong to say that an active Shia presence in Iraq is not a desired long-term outcome for Turkey, especially for Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait.

As mentioned above, one significant event that positively influenced the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional

Government was the invasion of Iraq by the United States. Because America has expressed its support for the Kurdistan Regional Government while also respecting the autonomy's right to self-governance. Following the establishment of a new Iraq after the occupation, the Erbil government in the north received support from America. Articles 116 and 141 of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution clearly outline the autonomous federal status of Iraqi Kurdistan. However, the recent calls for separation are not included in the constitution. While the constitution guarantees Iraq's unity, it also grants federal authorities the power to preserve this unity. Therefore, according to the 2005 Iraqi constitution, the autonomy of Kurds in the Iraqi region is permanent and has acquired legal personality, but it is not possible to speak of determining their own destiny in the name of independence.

Although Iraq's 2005 constitution meets some important expectations of the Kurdish Commission, we cannot say that the Kurdish government has achieved what it wanted in terms of economic and administrative boundaries. Following this stage, the main efforts of the Kurdistan Regional Government have been in the direction of taking 17% of the revenue from the Iraqi budget law, resolving disputed issues in their favor, making foreign policy decisions, and if necessary, establishing an independent Kurdistan state. They have even shown their desire to establish an independent Kurdistan of Iraq by holding an independence referendum in 2017.

According to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region's constitution; efforts to finalize the borders of disputed areas through a referendum in 2007 were repeatedly postponed by the central government, and they did not receive their allocated 17% share from the budget (Dalar, 2016). Due to the Iraqi government's stance, the Kurdistan Region has endeavored to develop an independent foreign policy. Such a policy has promoted the idea of independence. It is clear that a federal state cannot act independently in foreign policy, as the Iraqi constitution

clearly defines the powers of a federal state. According to the constitution, determining foreign policy and approving external economic and commercial activities fall within the federal state's jurisdiction (Article 110). Despite the explicit mention in the Iraqi constitution, events in the Middle East have disregarded this fact. Particularly, IŞİD's attempt to invade Iraq and the central government's questionable legitimacy in handing Mosul over to IŞİD without a fight have prompted concerns. Therefore, many states have sided with the Kurdistan Region, which appears stronger in fighting IŞİD. In fact, despite their strained relations with the central government, Ankara has developed closer ties with all regional Kurdish authorities in addition to supporting the Kurdistan Region's independence referendum.

The IKBY's struggle against IŞİD and the creation of an agenda in international relations

In the aftermath of the Cold War, many states, especially the US and Russia, started to have close relations with the Middle East. After the war, the USSR's opening to Europe following the initiation of a policy of appeasement, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the merger of Eastern European states with Western Europe and the Arab Spring with the overthrow of dictators in the Middle East have been the first signs of changes in the world. One of the most important components of this change has occurred in the Middle East geography, which was shaped by the exploitation plans of Western states. In fact, the root of the current problems in the Middle East lies in the establishment of Israel, the division of Arabs into separate kingdoms, and the drawing of borders regardless of ethnicity or religious beliefs.

The expansionist policy of the USA, which started with the Persian Gulf crisis and continued with the invasion of Iraq, has accelerated the development of new policies against the countries of the region and Russia. When Putin came to power in Russia, he played an active role in the region by supporting

the Assad regime, which led to the Arab Spring in Syria and the civil war that followed the Arab Spring. On the other hand, especially in the chaotic environment of Iraq and Syria, the Kurds emerged as the front line of the regional ground forces fighting against IŞİD in the eyes of the international community. With these processes, the Kurds consolidated their dominance in the regions left behind by DEAŞ/IŞİD.

The active role of Iran and Turkey, which are important regional actors and also home to a large Kurdish population, reflects the complex situation in the region. In this process, the Iraqi Kurds, who are directly involved in the war, have achieved great successes. The Iraqi government has also supported the Iraqi Kurds in their fight against IŞİD. Therefore, as a result of IŞİD's attempt to invade Iraq, the central government could not be sufficient against IŞİD and the Kurds with their own Peshmerga army acted positively in the fight against IŞİD and fought successfully. It was a political choice for the central Iraqi government to make concessions to the Northern Kurdistan Administration in the war environment, but this was because almost all of the forces fighting against IŞİD supported the IKBY in the fight against the US. The Iraqi government, desperate under these circumstances, co-operated with the IKBY, even if it was necessary. The weakening of the central government and the abandonment/abandonment of many cities, especially Mosul, to IŞİD led to the comments that the central government was militarily weak against the attack.

In areas outside the control of the central government, the Kurds, who received international support, established dominance in the areas where they defeated IŞİD (Mynet, 2017). The IKBY suffered both economic and military losses while fighting IŞİD. Although economic losses were compensated with the support of foreign countries, military losses were quite high. The official statement made by the Peshmerga Health Organisation affiliated to the Ministry of Peshmerga shows this. Within the framework of the above-mentioned statement;

1,745 Peshmerga lost their lives, approximately 10,000 people were wounded and 63 Peshmerga were reported missing in the 3-year period from June 2014 to July 2017. Since IŞİD could not be completely eliminated in the region, these losses have increased over time. However, this determined struggle of the Kurds against IŞİD in the field resulted in the victory of the Kurds.

The Place and Importance of the IKBY for Turkey

The IKBY, which has a strategic location, is rich in natural resources and is a part of Iraq in the Middle East geography, has always raised the issue of US intervention in the region. Turkey has been closely involved in the developments in the region for reasons such as the project of establishing a Kurdistan state in Iraq, the American idea of strengthening Israel and eliminating threats to Israel, the underground riches of the region, the idea of liberalising the Middle East and accordingly the adoption of the moderate Islam ideology and the desire to show it as an example to the region, expressing its views and support for the Arab Spring, in addition to the fact that it has become a region where problems such as the rise of the IŞİD terrorist organisation, which has not fallen off the global agenda recently, frequently arise.

Many conspiracy theories have been produced about the above-mentioned issues. The most important of these theories, and the one that has been realised over time, is the American project of an Israeli Middle East with Jerusalem as its capital, free from Arab and Iranian threats. As a matter of fact, if we look at the history, the countries of Iraq and Syria, which threatened Israel, were divided and turned into positions to solve their own problems. On the other hand, the bloc of Egypt and Saudi Arabia has already emerged on the American axis. Iran and the Hezbollah structures in Lebanon have remained a threat. The US has openly used its economic and diplomatic power to address these threats to Israel. The US, which has

made diplomatic efforts to weaken Iran and Hezbollah, has also sought new gains in Israel. Donald Trump's statement "*I will work to make Jerusalem the capital*" (Habertürk, 2016), the withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran, the termination of the 1955 agreement establishing economic relations and diplomatic missions with Iran, and the re-intensification of sanctions against Iran should be considered as America's policy of protecting Israel. On 6 December, the White House announced that Trump had recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel (Cumhuriyet, 2017). Considering this initiative, Jerusalem, which is considered sacred by Muslims, should be able to represent not only Jews but also Islam. Although this decision is a harbinger of a new conflict in the Middle East, it is also a sign that Israel does not pay much attention to the threat emanating from the Middle East. This move is an attempt to test the reaction of Iran and other countries in the Middle East.

It will be necessary to wait to see how Iran, which is currently the biggest threat, will react to this decision. The statements made by Iran and Hezbollah have posed the biggest threat to the state of Israel (Hurriyet, 2017). The good relations between Israel and the Kurds are independent of the US policy towards the Kurds. The IKBY, which has an important strategic position, is becoming increasingly important in regional and international relations. The recent US interest in the IKBY is part of its Middle East policy.

Another critical regional characteristic of the IKBY is its cosmopolitan culture. The IKBY has a multi-ethnic structure as it is part of the country of Iraq in Mesopotamia, home to the most ancient civilisation in the world. Besides Kurds, Turkmens and Arabs also live in the region. Due to the high concentration of Arabs and Turkmens, the decisions taken by the Kurdish government regarding these groups are closely followed by Turkey and the central government. In particular, Turkey closely followed the recent independence referendum in Kerkük, one of the disputed regions. It demanded that

Turkmens should not be neglected and stated that it would take all necessary measures to protect its compatriots in case of an attack on Turkmens. However, it would be more beneficial for Turkey in terms of long-term foreign policy to develop a dialogue that also includes the Kurds and a policy towards the Turkmens in the region.

The Yazidis are another element of the region. Yazidis have been living here since ancient times. Some sources even recognise the origins of the Yazidis in the provinces of Şeyhan and Sincar in northern Iraq. It has been known as the homeland of these people who tried to preserve their culture despite being massacred throughout history (Teliman, 2012). The fact that Êzidis started to attract the attention of the world is due to the reflection of the persecution of this community in Iraq by the IŞİD group on the world public opinion. Unable to assimilate other religions and committing massacres in the name of Islam, IŞİD persecuted the Yazidis the most in the region. As in Myanmar, Yazidis have also attracted the world's attention due to their displacement from their homes and persecution (ONDEIO, 2017).

Another critical feature of the IKBY is its geostrategic and geopolitical situation arising from its historical process. For the Middle East, the route to Europe passes through Turkey. Allied with the US, which declared war on the Saddam regime, the IKBY achieved many successes after the war and became a safe and strategic harbour. Thanks to the autonomy and the Green Line project, it has become a base and ally of the USA as a war-free region in the Middle East, and has also escaped from the chaotic process. Especially after the invasion of Iraq, all the forces fighting against IŞİD were given the appearance of land forces in Iraq and were supported by the Central Government.

On the other hand, the IKBY plays an important role in the flow of oil in the Middle East. Due to the uncertain and complex environment in the Middle East, in most cases, when the Persian Gulf is not operational and transport from

there is not possible, oil is shipped to Europe via Turkey via
the Kerkük-Yumurtalık (Ceyhan) route. The pipeline in the
region shows the importance of the region. In fact, Turkey has
raised the issue of stopping the flow of oil after the Barzani
referendum, but no step has been taken so far.

Political Relations between Turkey and the IKBY

After the 2001 crisis, especially after the AKP came to
power, Turkey started to recover economically and started
to take important initiatives for democracy. Today, although
Turkey's democracy and economy are controversial, there
have been important events such as "Kurdish opening, Alevi
rights, lifting the headscarf ban", etc., except in recent times. It
is still debatable whether these events will continue or not. As
a result of these events, close relations have been established
between Turkey and the Kurdish government in the IKBY,
especially between the Kurdish initiatives and the economic
sector. In general, the importance of the IKBY government for
Turkey can be listed as follows: Economic interests, being on
the border, similar beliefs and civilisations, Turkey's security
issues and the Kurds' own issues (Dalar, 2016).

The main principle of every country is to prioritise the
interests of the country and to formulate policies with the
understanding of protecting and developing these interests
against other countries and groups. Turkey is dependent on
foreign oil and natural gas resources. Therefore, the IKBY,
which has valuable underground resources, is important for
Turkey in this respect. Another critical feature of the IKBY
for Ankara is its border with Turkey. Of course, neighbouring
countries are geopolitically important for each other (Mynet,
2009). On the other hand, apart from Kurdistan and the
surrounding areas, there is a dense Kurdish population on both
sides of the autonomous region. The presence of Turkmens is
interrelated like neighbouring brothers. In fact, these peoples
lived together in the same region for many years during the
Ottoman Empire (Kaslak, 2004).

Although Turkey is improving its relations with the Kurdish government, it cannot ignore factors such as its inability to fully solve the "Kurdish problem" and the PKK's inability to stop its actions. The IKBY, whose population is predominantly Kurdish and in some parts of which the PKK may be present, is also aware of its importance for Turkey. Therefore, there are many factors affecting the relationship between the two countries. Although the Kurdistan Regional Government is not economically dependent on Turkey, it is dependent on Turkey in terms of security, economic gains and cultural conditions.

Turkey and Kurdistan, where Turkish and Kurdish ethnic groups live densely, are similar in terms of beliefs and culture. Therefore, it is right and logical for both sides to have close relations with each other. This similarity is an advantage for Turkey to establish close relations with the IKBY. Another critical factor that makes the relationship between the Kurdistan Region and Turkey valuable is economic relations.

Factors that negatively affect relations

Under AKP rule, Turkey has developed important political and economic ties with the Kurds since 2007. However, there are many factors that negatively affect these economic and political relations. The most critical of these is the presence of the PKK. Airstrikes against the PKK are another factor that has an impact on relations. On the other hand, the controversial situation in the Kerkükk region and the dissatisfaction of the Turkmens living in the region with the IKBY negatively affect the relations. Another important factor is that the independence referendum brought relations to a breaking point and the IKBY took steps towards independence.

The events affecting Turkey-IKBY relations threaten Turkey's national integrity and Turkmens living in the Turkish Red Line. These include, in general, the PKK terrorist factor, the issue of the status of the Kurdish government or the Barzani government's efforts to develop the borders of the autonomous

state after the 25 September 2017 independence referendum, and the situation of Turkmens living in the region. If these red lines are crossed, Turkey will cut ties with the region and respond with economic sanctions and cross-border operations. However, Turkey has never completely ended the close relationship established since 2007. After the end of the crisis, it is seen that the deteriorated relations have improved again.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) factor

After the first conference held between 15-26 July 1981, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) started to establish its presence in this region. Following this decision, the organisation negotiated some agreements with the Kurds and started to settle in Kurdish areas. In this process, many PKK leaders and cadres migrated via Tehran and Syria and settled in Northern Iraq. By settling in the Kurdish region, the PKK took advantage of the mountainous geography of the region. The reason for this situation is that the Cudi mountain range, the largest mountain range in Northern Iraq, extends to the territory of Turkey (Özdağ, 2000). This enabled the PKK to carry out its terrorist activities inside Turkey. On the other hand, the existence of a politicised Kurdish group in the region allowed it to act freely.

The signing of an agreement called *"Principle of Solidarity"* with the IKBY in July 1983 strengthened the PKK's hand. The PKK, which had been deployed in Syria and Lebanon since 1980, quickly moved its camps to the IKBY with the establishment of the Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq after the agreement. The camps were used for training militants and especially for propaganda training. The armed consequences of this development were seen in the following years when the PKK increased its attacks on border gates (Özdağ, 2000). The PKK faction turned out to be the most important factor causing problems in Turkey-IKBY relations. Starting from 2003, Erbil-Ankara relations started to become

tense with the increase in PKK's attacks against Turkey from Northern Iraq (Barut, 2013).

The incident that brought relations between Turkey and the IKBY to a deadlock occurred after PKK militants attacked an infantry battalion stationed in Dağlıca, Yüksekova district of Hakkari. In this attack, 12 soldiers lost their lives, 8 soldiers were taken hostage and 16 soldiers were wounded. Following the attack, a summit was held on 21 October at Çankaya Mansion under the leadership of President Abdullah Gül and the public was asked to act with common sense (Doruk, 2010). The summit emphasised the decisive fight against terrorism and demonstrated Turkey's legitimate reaction.

In the aftermath of these attacks, military action against Iraq was on the agenda of the Turkish public opinion and opposition parties. While the CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, Republic People's Party) and MHP (*Milliyetçi Harekat Partisi*, Nationalist Movement Party) advocated military operations in Northern Iraq, the government approached the incident cautiously and wanted to negotiate with the US and cooperate with the Iraqi central government and the Washington (Doruk, 2010). In response to these attacks, people in Turkey took to the streets and protests were organised across the country. On 21 October, at the summit held under the presidency of the President, brotherhood was emphasised against the threat of civil war and common sense was called for.

"The day of unity and solidarity against these attacks will be welcomed by all institutions and organisations of our beloved country. While respecting the territorial integrity of Iraq, our country will not tolerate aiding and abetting terrorist organisations and will not hesitate to pay the necessary price to protect its rights, laws, inalienable integrity and citizens" (Doruk, 2010).

While this reaction was being manifested under the leadership of the President, the Prime Ministry Bill authorising the government to conduct an operation in northern Iraq

for a period of one year was approved by 507 votes in the General Assembly of the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 17 October 2007. CHP Chairman Deniz Baykal considered this as "*very important*" and gave operational support to the government by saying "*You cannot take such a decision and lie*". MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli gave the same support.

The government, fearing military operations escalating into war with Iraq and complete breakdown of dialogue with Iraqi Kurds, decided to impose an economic embargo instead of war on the IKBY administration. During this period, Turkey's state policy towards Kurds had hit a deadlock and reached a crossroads (Doruk, 2010). Ankara had to choose between viewing Kurds as enemies and engaging in war with them, or acting rationally to avoid cutting ties completely. Referring to the PKK's attack in Dağlıca in October 2007 as a turning point in relations with Iraqi Kurdistan and Baghdad, Ahmet Davutoğlu, then Foreign Minister, described his visit to Erbil in 2009 as follows:

"Two years ago, in October 2007, when a terrorist attack occurred in Dağlıca, there was a very dark scenario. We were going to enter Iraqi territories and conflict with Kurds. Maybe someone wanted this. After the Dağlıca attack in November 2007, I went to Baghdad for the first time; I met with Nechirvan Barzani, the administrative authority of the Kurdistan Federation. All these versions collapsed within two years. Instead, we reached a strong cooperation ground without conflict. These policies must be strongly implemented. This trip is a turning point in historical terms."

According to Davutoğlu's statement, Turkey has managed to overcome difficult times without engaging in conflict with Iraq. In this regard, attacks by PKK terrorists from the north of Iraq, including Dağlıca and other regions of Turkey, have continued in subsequent periods, but this situation has not disrupted relations with the regional Kurdish government. As a result of this process, Turkey conducted air strikes on PKK camps along the northern border of Iraq.

Cross-border operations.

The cross-border operations of the armed forces are actually a result of the PKK's influence. Turkey has repeatedly stated that it has no eye on the territories of any state (Kurdistan24, 2016). Therefore, it is clear that the main reason for Turkey's cross-border operation is security. Turkey has carried out various military operations in the region to ensure stability and security. While conducting these operations, Turkey has tried to adhere to the rules of international law. In order to prevent PKK attacks, Turkey has developed diplomatic relations with Iraq and Syria, and taken joint measures in the fight against the PKK. As part of this, a security protocol was signed with Iraq on October 15, 1984, granting Turkey the right to conduct hot pursuit within a depth of 5 km in Iraqi territory (Özdağ, 2000). This protocol laid the legal basis for later air operations against PKK camps in Northern Iraq. Following this agreement, the Turkish army has conducted numerous operations in the regions controlled by the IKBY. These operations not only imposed a new economic burden on Turkey but also necessitated cooperation with Iraq to eliminate the PKK threat. Turkey has made various agreements and protocols with Iraq to carry out these operations in accordance with international law and the principle of national sovereignty.

During the years 2003-2007, the strained relationship between Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government due to the TSK (*Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri*, Turkish Armed Forces) operation in Northern Iraq began to normalize with the visit of officials from the Kurdish Commission. The Turkish side emphasized that they did not harm civilians in the region, their main targets were the PKK group and camps, and that necessary precautions were taken by the Turkish Armed Forces to prevent civilian casualties (Barut, 2013).

Turkey does not find it legitimate or appropriate to carry out air operations in Iraq's territory due to the Iraq Federal

Government's failure to fulfill its obligations to eliminate terrorist attacks against Turkey. Turkey defended itself by referring to UN (*Birleşmiş Milletler*, United Nations) resolutions against the notes provided by Iraq, and prepared the legal grounds for its operations with the agreement signed with Iraq and Article 51 of the UN Charter regarding the "*right to self-defense.*"

Air strikes on PKK camps in Northern Iraq

The status issue of the IKBY

From Turkey's perspective, the PKK issue, cross-border operations to neutralize the PKK, the status of the regional Kurdish government, and Iraq's territorial integrity are interconnected, with Turkey's security at the center of it all.

The status issue of the Iraqi government is generally considered an internal matter of Iraq. However, the weakening of Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War and the subsequent US invasion in 2003 have turned into a problem for the neighboring countries. The formation of a new Iraqi state following its fragmentation is of great interest to neighboring states. While Iran and Syria want a Shia government, Turkey has sought a government with active involvement from Sunni Arabs and Turkmen. Turkey has sought to take advantage of the authority vacuum, particularly in economically significant areas like Kerkük under the administration of Erbil, and has expressed

great concern over the strengthening of the IKBY. Turkey has been concerned that the autonomous Kurdish region on its border would pose a threat and become a refuge for PKK militants, and these concerns have been partly proven right in the subsequent years.

The constitutional referendum in 2005 effectively resolved the status issue of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. However, the 2005 constitution did not clearly address the presence of disputed territories. Among these areas, the question of whether Kerkük should be under the control of the Iraqi central government or the autonomous Kurdish region was not specified. This issue directly affects the relationship between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the Iraqi central government, and indirectly impacts Turkey's relations with the parties involved. Turkey, following a policy in line with Iraq's territorial integrity, opposes the region being handed over to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, based on the understanding that Kerkük is a Turkmen city (Köylü, 2017).

Controversial Areas

It should be noted that most of the regions labeled as "*controversial areas*," especially those rich in oil resources. The most controversial region is the oil-rich Kerkük. Generally, Turkey supports the limited autonomous region of the Kurdistan Regional Government (IKBY), but expresses concerns about adding the Turkmen city of Kerkük to the Erbil administration, as it is rich in oil. The Erbil administration insists that the region is a Kurdish city and supports the people's choice through a referendum. The Baghdad administration, on the other hand, argues that the region is under the control of the central Iraqi government.

The question of whether Kirkuk is Kurdish, Turkish, or Arab is a continuous subject of debate. As understood from past population censuses, Kerkük was once part of the Mosul province. This is because the region's demographic structure

has constantly changed for political reasons. For example, while an Arabization policy was pursued in the region in the early 1950s, the Erbil administration has been following a policy of Kurdishization since 2005 (Dalar, 2015).

Before World War I, around 55-60% of the region's population consisted of Kurds, 10-15% Turks, 10-15% Arabs, and 6-7% other groups. Turkey has argued that this region should be under its control, stating that it has a significant Turkish and relatively Kurdish population (Yazıcı, 2011). Reports presented by Turkey and Britain at the Lausanne Peace Conference claimed that Kurds and Turks made up the majority of the region's population. According to Turkey, Mosul had 263,830 Kurds, 146,960 Turks, 43,210 Arabs, and 18,000 Yazidis. According to the British, there were 66,000 Turks, 445,000 Kurds, 186,000 Arabs, 62,000 Christians, and 17,000 Jews living in the region (Yamaç, 2019). According to this, it is clear that between 1919 and 1924, Turks and Kurds were the majority in the region in any case.

Today, the issue of Kerkük, which is now part of Mosul in Iraq, is on the agenda due to the rights claimed by the IKBY over Kerkük. For the resolution of the issue, the 2005 constitution called for a census and referendum in Kerkük and other conflict areas to determine the will of the people, but it was cancelled in 2007 due to political reasons and economic interests. The referendum held on September 25, 2017, saw the Kurdish people using 92.73% of their votes in favor of independence, yet the issue remains unresolved. Kerkük came under the administration of the IKBY in 2014, but was transferred back to the central government after 2017 (Köylü, 2017; Dalar, 2015).

Contentious areas between the Erbil administration and the Baghdad government continue to be a problem. After DEAŞ occupied Iraq in 2014, the Iraqi army withdrew from Mosul and many disputed areas without fighting. With Western support, Peshmerga forces cleared these areas of DEAŞ

militants, gaining control of approximately 95 contested areas by the end of 2017. This was confirmed by IKBY's Minister of Disputed Territories, Nasreddin Sait. It is observed that before the referendum held on September 25, 2017, the Erbil administration had taken control of most of the land it claimed rights to.

IKBY is composed of 3 provinces: Duhok, Erbil, and Süleymaniye. These provinces are part of the region. The Central Government also recognizes the allegiance of these three provinces to IKBY. As per Article 8 of the 2006 Constitution, the structure of the Region includes Duhok Province, Erbil, Kerkük, Süleymaniye Province, Akra, Ninova Province, Sincar, Talafar, Telkeif, Karkus, Zummar, and surroundings of Başika, Old Kelek in Diyala, Hanekin and Mendeli, Bedre and Sesan cities in Wasit region (Kekilli et al., 2017). It is evident that the official website of the Kurdistan Regional Government is not in line with the administrative structure envisaged in the 2006 Constitution. This is due to the disputed status of the region. In 2014, security of these areas was effectively carried out by the Peshmerga forces. IKBY has gained control over most of the regions it aimed to control in 2014. The Barzani administration lost these gains when it called for a referendum for independence.

The Kurdistan Regional Government withdrew to its pre-2014 borders after conducting the independence referendum in September 2017, regardless of the reactions of the USA, Turkey, and the EU (*Avrupa Birliği*, European Union) . The Iraqi Government has reclaimed administration in these territories taken from IŞİD. Therefore, many IKBY officials have found the international reactions to this referendum justified and have opposed it. Both the central government and the IKBY administration have addressed this issue in accordance with Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution or a similar supplementary draft.

As the referendum in Kirkuk approaches, the revenue between Turkey and the Kurdistan Region has increased. Turkey has stated that the referendum needs to be postponed. Turkey argues that these areas were deliberately Kurdified after the occupation of Iraq. They have demanded a different status for the region by claiming the existence of Turkmens. Ankara is concerned that if a region like Kerkük, which has high economic benefits, falls under the control of the Kurdistan Region, it would strengthen the Kurds' hand in establishing an independent Kurdish state. On the other hand, the Kurdistan Region has strongly criticized Turkey's intervention in the referendum process. They have emphasized that the referendum is an internal issue of Iraq and will be carried out according to Iraq's understanding. The Kurdistan Region has accused Turkey of interfering in Iraq's sovereignty and internal affairs. In such a situation, they have stated that they would intervene in the incidents in Diyarbakir and indirectly interfere in our country's internal affairs. However, despite having a constitution that would prevent the region from losing its wealth, the central government opposed the referendum in 2007. This situation was positively received by the Turkmen communities in the region and in Turkey. The tension between the Kurdistan Region and the central government continues.

The terrorist organisation IŞİD captured many disputed regions under the control of the central government and enabled the IKBY to take the disputed regions under its borders. The IKBY, which also assumed the role of a ground force together with the coalition forces in the fight against IŞİD, settled in the regions liberated from IŞİD in a short time. This situation remained valid until the independence referendum was declared by the IKBY. As a matter of fact, after the independence referendum, upon the reactions of many states, especially Turkey, Iran and the USA, the Central Government took the lead and gave the IKBY a deadline to evacuate the disputed regions, especially Kerkük. Upon the Erbil administration's

acceptance of the withdrawal, the IKBY returned to its former borders and the IKBY status negotiations were temporarily closed.

25 September 2017 independence referendum

The independence referendum held by the Barzani administration on September 25, 2017 received strong reactions from Turkey, Iran, the Baghdad government, and the United States. In this process, Turkey, Iran, and the Iraqi central government have adopted a policy of punishing the Kurdistan Regional Government after the referendum (Kekilli, 2018). Indeed, the Kurds paid a heavy price for this after the referendum. Acting on the orders of Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, on October 16, the Iraqi army, Hashd al-Shaabi elements, and special forces entered Kerkük and seized control of much of the disputed region under the control of the IKBY government. At the request of the Iraqi central government, the airspace in Northern Iraq was closed. The production and sale of oil by the IKBY has largely begun to be controlled by Baghdad, and border controls have been tightened. Since 2003, in the fight against IŞİD, the IKBY has lost many of its gains.

Turkey has approached the Kurdistan Regional Government with a security-indexed policy similar to that of the 1990s towards Baghdad. Recognizing Iraq as the sole interlocutor, Turkey has supported Baghdad's embargo policy against the IKBY and stood by its side (Kekilli, 2018). President Erdoğan responded in the strongest terms, stating, "*It is necessary and obligatory for the Northern Iraq administration to step back from this action. We will not allow the establishment of multiple terrorist states in Syria. It is a dry dream for them. I have said to you that we can come suddenly at night*" (BBCNEWS, 2017). It greatly disturbed our country that the Erbil administration included the disputed regions, especially Kerkük, in the referendum on independence.

Pressures targeting Turkmen people

Within the borders of Iraq, the Turkmen population is the most populous after Arabs and Kurds. There are approximately 3 million Turks living in the region (Özdağ, 2000). According to many commentators, the concept of "Turkmen" stems from an attempt to assimilate the Turks living in the region. During the Lausanne Conference, İsmet İnönü, who represented Turkey, referred to the Turks in the region as Turkmen when addressing the delegates of the British delegation. İnönü indicated that the term "Turkmen" is synonymous with the word "Turk" and emphasized that he did not "exploit it as a political tool" (Doğan, 2012).

After the establishment of Iraq, the Turkmen, while not pursuing a policy of rebellion like the Kurds living in the region, have faced periodic persecutions. The most notable of these persecutions are the 1924 Kerkük massacre, the 1946 Gavurbağ massacre, the 1959 Kerkük massacre, and the Altınköprü massacre (Doğan, 2012). The common thread among these atrocities is the desire of the majority of the Turks living in Kirkuk to improve their human rights and criticize the Iraqi government's exclusionary policies towards minorities. In other words, these massacres were not carried out as a result of a specific rebellion. The Turkmen living in the region have taken parallel positions in relation to Turkey and Iraq policies (Özdağ, 2000). Due to Turkey's policy of supporting Iraq's territorial integrity, the Turks living in the region have not demanded independence or autonomy.

The policy of the IKBY resembles the self-rule policy of the past Saddam regime. The situation of the Turkmen living in the region, especially after the 2005 referendum, has become another important factor determining the relationship between the IKBY and Turkey. Since 2005, Turkey has continued its policy regarding Iraq's territorial integrity due to the new legal situation in the IKBY. Particularly, the Turkmen living in Kerkük did not want this area to fall under the control of the

IKBY. In this context, the Turkmen, who were previously a weak link in Turkey-IKBY relations, have become an important link in the relationship between the two countries, especially after the independence referendum held on September 25, 2017. Turkey considers any kind of attack on the Turkmen living in the region as a red line.

Legal efforts of the Barzani administration

Turkey's stance towards The IKBY, which has gained autonomy since 2005, is intriguing. Turkey, which has historically pursued a policy of preserving Iraq's territorial integrity, has shown respect for the autonomy of the Kurds according to the Iraqi constitution and has started to establish diplomatic, political, and economic relations with the Iraqi Kurds. However, the Barzani administration has violated Iraq's 2005 constitution, taken steps towards independence, and annexed the "disputed territories," which has strained relations.

The 2005 Iraqi constitution does not include the right to "self-determination" in any form. It stipulates that any decision affecting the people must be made in accordance with the constitution, and that the federal government cannot make such decisions alone. Meanwhile, DEAŞ seized control of Kerkük in 2014. During this period, the Barzani administration provided significant support to the global fight against DEAŞ. With the confidence generated by this support, the Barzani administration declared in September 25, 2017, that the time had come for the referendum planned for 2007 (Kekilli, 2018). The Iraqi Federal Court later annulled the referendum on the grounds that it was contrary to the Iraqi constitution. Turkey finds the Barzani administration's decision for independence and its actions to go beyond the constitutional boundaries of Iraq unacceptable. In this context, the rights arising from the 1926 treaty between Turkey and Iraq come to the forefront. Ultimately, Erbil's attempts to control disputed territories, especially Kerkük, have become significant issues in the development of bilateral relations.

## Post-2000 Turkey's Political Relations with the IKBY

Turkey's close relationship with the KDP goes back to the Turgut Ozal era. In the 1980s, the PKK, which posed a threat to Turkey's national unity, began carrying out actions in Turkey. The PKK used the mountainous regions of Northern Iraq, where Kurds lived, as a refuge (Balcı, 2014). During this period, Turkey conducted operations against the PKK in the Kandil Mountains area, while also trying to establish contact with the local population. Prior to 1990, Turkey's relations with the region had developed within the framework of diplomatic relations with the central government.

The main factor directing the Turkish government's policies towards the Kurds has been security since the first crisis in the Persian Gulf that initiated the process of dividing Iraq. The fear underlying these security policies is the creation of an autonomous Kurdish region with the division of Iraq. Furthermore, the strengthening of PKK factions in the region after 1983 and the increase in anti-Turkish activities have been another important factor.

While discussing Iraq in domestic politics, on January 17, 1991, a coalition under the leadership of the UN bombed Iraq. When the coalition forces ended the approximately 45-day war, Saddam Hussein was not toppled, but radical decisions undermining Iraq's integrity were made.

After the Gulf War, Saddam's army, seeking revenge for its defeat, forced the Kurds in Northern Iraq to migrate towards the Turkish border (Köse, 2018). Turkey, already burdened with thousands of Kurds fleeing the Halepçe massacre, faced a new wave of migration. Özal made diplomatic efforts to create a safe zone in Iraq for the Kurdish refugees to return home (Köse, 2018). Ultimately, tens of thousands of Iraqi Kurds gathered at the Turkish border were put on the UN agenda. In response, on April 5, 1991, the UN adopted Resolution 688, ending the suppression policy against the Kurds. The UN declared a no-fly zone beyond the 36th parallel, with coalition forces defending

the region from Saddam's attacks. This international effort for Northern Iraq was known as "*Operation Provide Comfort*" in English (Oran, 1996).
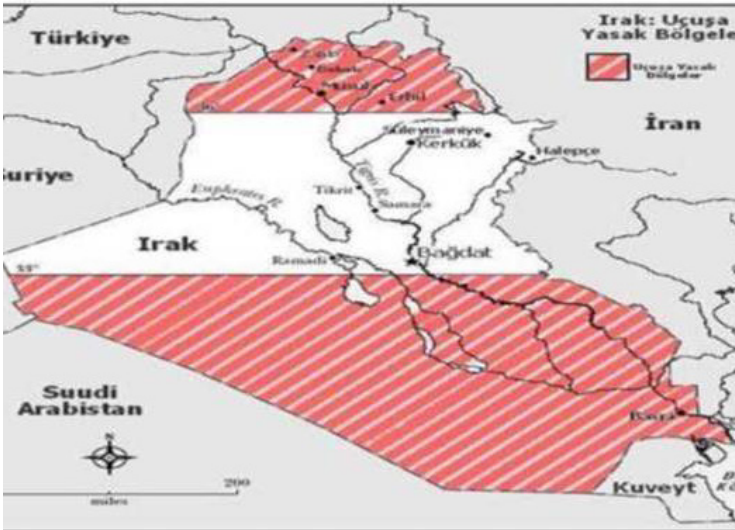
No-fly zone declared in Iraq in 1991

In this context, the decision that has been taken has led to unwanted consequences for Turkey. A new interlocutor has emerged for Turkey in its struggle against the PKK in Iraq. Turkey has initiated secret and then open talks with the Kurds. In 1991, the then President Turgut Özal emphasized Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood in a secret meeting with Kurdish government leaders and requested support in the fight against the PKK. On the other hand, Özal, who had a humanistic approach, did not remain silent about the massacres Saddam had committed against the Kurds in the past. He had the biggest share in opening the border gates at that time. According to journalist Cengiz Çandar, Prime Minister Turgut Özal, so affected by the Halepçe massacre, opened Turkey's doors to Kurdish refugees despite all efforts against the state structure (Özal Yılları, Körfez Savaşı Belgeseli, böl. ch. .109).

Initially criticized by Süleyman Demirel for his policies, once he became Prime Minister, Demirel met with Kurdish government officials to discuss any possible attacks on Kurds in Iraq and emphasized that Turkey would not remain silent in a new Halepçe massacre scenario (Od, 2015). Following this meeting, on July 25, 1992, Iraqi Kurdish party leaders Mesut Barzani and Celal Talabani were granted Red Passports at the request of President Özal. With these passports, the two leaders were able to introduce themselves to the world. Thus, Özal's direct talks with the Kurdish government created a new interlocutor for Turkey to solve the PKK issue. Turkey has tried to separate the Kurdish region from the PKK in this way. With the support of two Kurdish leaders, the aim was to prevent Kurds from joining the PKK.

Turkey's security policy, aligned with the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, continued until 2007 (Öğür vd. 2014). Therefore, the rejection of the "1st of March Authorization" related to the invasion of Iraq by the United States is based on this security concern.

After the end of Saddam Hussein's regime, a new era began in Iraq's political history. The Kurdistan Region in Iraq, which stood alongside the United States, benefited the most from this process (Öğür vd. 2014). During the invasion, the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, in connection with the United States, spread across a wide area in Iraq and had the opportunity to expand the boundaries of autonomy previously obtained. The Peshmerga forces were deployed in the Mosul and Kerkük provinces, allowing Kerkük to be included in the autonomous state borders based on the 1970 Iraq-Kurdistan Autonomy Agreement.

After the invasion of Iraq, the Kurdistan Region in Iraq actively participated in the activities of the interim government established in 2004. Kurdish politician Behram Salih led the interim government, and many Kurdish politicians began to take high positions. With the implementation of the Transitional

Government Law, the previously "de facto" Kurdistan government was designated as the "Regional Kurdistan Government" of the Iraqi Federal State and gained many new rights. Kurdish was recognized as the second official language of Iraq. Despite the promises made in the Iraqi Constitution approved by referendum on October 15, 2005, regarding the rights concerning Kerkük and other disputed areas, the Kurdistan Region in Iraq did not get what they wanted. Claims that the future of disputed areas would be determined by a referendum in 2007 were continuously disregarded by the central government.

With the 2005 Constitution, the first democratic elections were held on 15 December 2005. In these first elections, Kurds became an effective force by taking critical positions such as the Presidency, Deputy Prime Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc. After the elections, the IKBY, which preserved these gains and left a democratic impression from the outside, was seen as a safe harbour for economic investment, unlike Iraq, which succumbed to the spiral of violence.

Despite the central government's reaction starting in 2006, Northern Iraq took a significant step towards economic independence by enacting a petroleum law and signing contracts with petroleum companies. Believing that it would not receive the 17% share of the Iraqi budget as required by the Iraqi constitution, the IKBY developed an independent economic policy separate from the central government. Within the framework of these policies, the IKBY played the role of an independent country by making various agreements with foreign countries and businesses. Since 2009, the administration of Erbil has become a critical alternative to the government in Baghdad, especially through direct contracts with energy companies (Öğür et al., 2014). During this process, Turkey has grown increasingly frustrated with the passive central government and has criticized the Erbil administration and U.S. regional policies. As a result, tensions arose between

the Kurdistan Region and the U.S. following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and even reached the brink of war. In fact, before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Turkey had played a central role in negotiations for a relatively easy invasion plan, with Ankara planning for the Turkish Armed Forces to enter Northern Iraq and control an approximately 30km deep area (Milliyet, 2013). This plan would have eased Turkey's hand in regular cross-border operations against the PKK, as well as prevented the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq, thus ensuring a say in the future of Iraq. However, the approval of the 1 March Motion was an important condition for the agreement to be valid in the eyes of the U.S. Unfortunately, the motion was rejected by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Öğür et al., 2014). This rejection prevented Turkey from overcoming the Kurdistan Regional Government in the 1990s and weakened Ankara's hand in shaping Iraq's future.

AK Party Periods and Turkey's Policies towards the IKBY

During the AKP period, Turkey's policies towards the Middle East developed in the form of "Zero Problems with Neighbors Policy" and "Proactive Foreign Policy" between 2002-2009. The 1st of March Motion, which was presented to the Turkish Grand National Assembly by the government on February 25, 2003 regarding the Iraq crisis, was rejected in the general assembly. The full title of the motion was "Authorization for the Government to Send Turkish Armed Forces to Foreign Countries and Allow Foreign Armed Forces to be Present in Turkey."

During this period, ideas highlighted by former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in his book "Strategic Depth," emphasizing the need for a comprehensive reevaluation of Turkey's weakened strategic position in the Middle East since 1990, began to influence foreign policy. Taking into account Turkey's unique strategic position, Davutoğlu referred to

Turkey's history in the region and advocated for a thesis emphasizing the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. In other words, Davutoğlu argued that in addition to being a modern country, Turkey should establish close relations with Balkan and Middle Eastern countries that were part of the former Ottoman Empire. Therefore, Turkey should acknowledge the cultural, political, and societal responsibilities inherited from the Ottoman legacy and adjust its foreign policy accordingly (Davutoğlu, 2004).

Davutoğlu; rejects the idea that "*Turkey is surrounded by enemies with no problems with neighbors*" and believes that positive relations with all neighbors are necessary. In this context, he has stated that in order to overcome the problems faced by neighbors, the Kurdistan Regional Government should be placed in a broad area where inter-communal relations are intensified, and economic, social, and cultural elements are predominant.

Another key point of Davutoğlu's foreign policy is the proactive understanding of foreign policy. He argues that Turkey's geostrategic position has brought a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted structure to its foreign policy and that politics should be developed within this framework. Davutoğlu emphasizes the development of relations with Russia while establishing close neighborly relations with Turkey's neighbors in the Middle East and the Balkans. Additionally, he mentions the importance of Turkey's commitment to democracy and maintaining close relations with the United States and EU countries (Doruk, 2010). The active foreign policy reflected in President Abdullah Gül's foreign visits in 2007 is an indication of this approach.

Ahmet Davutoğlu's foreign policy approach, briefly mentioned above, overlaps with the foreign policy approach of the first generation of the AKP. Davutoğlu's appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs was based on this vision and the unique foreign policy approach adopted by the AKP. Therefore, during this period, our country's Middle East

policy progressed with close relations and cooperation with its neighbors as suggested by Davutoğlu. Close relations were established with Syria, Iraq, other Arab countries, and neighboring Balkan countries, with mutual high-level visits being made to these states. In this period, Turkey demonstrated its desire to establish close relations with all its neighbors with the visit of then-President Abdullah Gül to Armenia in 2008 (Dünya Gazetesi, 2008).

Early Period of AKP's Iraq Kurdistan Region Policy (2003-2005)

In order not to be left out of the ongoing process, Turkey tried to improve its relations with the United States, which had become tense after the March 1 Motion, to join the coalition forces and to cooperate with the United States (Doruk, 2010). In this context, the "7 October Motion" adopted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 2003 was interpreted as a compensation for the 1 March Motion. Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül stated that Turkey's presence in northern Iraq would continue until the terrorist threat from the region to our country ended. Although Turkey's desire to keep troops in the region was developed in line with border operations in the region, this scenario was perceived as disrespect to Iraqi sovereignty by both the Iraqi Interim Government Council and the IKBY leadership (Hürriyet, 2003). The IKBY leadership has always opposed the presence of Turkish military forces in Iraqi territory, considering it an obstacle to achieving their goals.

In August 2002, the IKBY leader Massoud Barzani told National Public Radio that the number of Turkish troops in the region had increased and demanded that Ankara withdraw its troops from the region. On 26 February 2003, the IKBY parliament issued a statement declaring that the entry of Turkish troops into the region as part of the Iraq operation was unacceptable. In this framework, the possibility of a unilateral

military operation in Northern Iraq, which became a hot topic after the 1 March Motion, increased regional tensions and protests were held against Turkey in Erbil (Doruk, 2010).

Another incident that created tension between the Kurds and Ankara was the detention of 11 Turkish soldiers in Iraq's Sulaymaniyah city on 4 July 2003 by American forces with sacks over their heads. Since Turkey's interests in the region do not coincide with those of the US, the US showed its willingness to work with the Kurds in the region with this ugly attack on Turkish forces. The rejection of the 1 March Motion caused the US to take an interest in the Iraqi Kurds and to develop policies towards them in the Middle East. While these policies had a negative impact on Turkish-American relations, they also led to direct tensions with the Iraqi Kurds. Turkey's insistence on a military presence has become evident with the rise of anti-Turkish terrorism since 2003, and since 2003 Iraqi Kurds have distanced themselves from the PKK and pro-Turkish Iraqi Kurds have helped Turkey against the PKK.

Turkey's unilateral policy of keeping troops in Iraq could not be implemented due to the negative reaction of the US (Doruk, 2010). Aware of this, the AK Party developed a new policy towards the region and focused on taking part in the reconstruction of Iraq, especially in the context of economic gains and neoliberal policies.

On 7 November 2003, Turkey took a critical step in normalising relations with the KBY by announcing that the decision to send troops to Iraq would not be implemented. On 20 November 2003, KYP leader Celal Talabani, who came to Turkey as the head of the Iraqi Transitional Government, met with Prime Minister Erdoğan and stated that he wanted Turkey to be economically, not militarily, effective in the region (Doruk, 2010). However, on 3 January 2004, Mesut Barzani stated that he did not want a federal system based on provinces in Iraq and wanted the Kurdish region to have a say in the control of Kerkük and Musul oil fields, but the Iraqi administration did

not allow this (Radikal, 2004). Iran, Syria and Turkey strongly
criticised the desire to establish a unified Kurdish autonomous
region on the basis of ethnicity and emphasised that the Kurdish
autonomous region should be oriented on a geographical axis
(Doruk, 2010).

Turkey reacted by saying that Kurds were deliberately
settled in the Kerkük region in order to change the demographic
structure of the region. Turkey, on the other hand, defended
the rights of Turkmens "affected by the Kurdisation policy" in
Kerkük and stated that they were disturbed by the events. In
the 2005 Iraqi elections, Barzani said: *"Kerkük is a Kurdish
city. An independent Kurdish state will be established, but I do
not know when. After the elections, a referendum will be held
according to the will of the society"*, thus increasing Turkey's
concern on the issue. Prime Minister Erdoğan criticised
Barzani's statement at the AKP's group meeting on Iraqi
elections on 1 February 2005 and emphasised that the territorial
integrity of Iraq and other ethnic identities in the region should
be respected (Doruk, 2010).

Formation of IKBY Policy, Efforts to Shift from Security Strategy to Cooperation Strategy (2005-2007)

The referendum of 15 October 2005 resulted in the adoption
of a new Iraqi constitution, which confirmed the Iraqi federal
structure and allowed for the normalisation of relations with
the IKBY. With this development, the existence of the IKBY
state became legal. Turkey acted cautiously against this
development, which it had previously seen as undesirable and
a cause for war, and avoided any statements that would create
tension. This moderate Turkish policy was based on the belief
that Iraq should somehow stabilise and accept this change in
the region. The 30 January 2005 statement of the National
Security Council that "Turkey attaches importance to close
dialogue and cooperation with the new Iraqi administration and
all segments of its people" (Doruk, 2010) reflected the changes
in Turkey's policy towards the KRG government.

The above-mentioned MGK (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*, National Securitl Council) statement, especially the military wing's messages of recognition of the existence of the IKBY, paved the way for the government to establish relations with the region and reassured it. On 25 October, the PKK leaders and the IKBY president Massoud Barzani were received by US President Bush at the White House. Answering the questions of journalists at the 29 October Republic Day celebrations coinciding with this meeting, General Hilmi Özkök, the Chief of General Staff, emphasised that Turkey should act within the framework of the new situation in Iraq. Turkey had to determine its policy according to the new situation in Iraq (Radikal, 2005). Since then, Turkish policy makers have started to establish close relations with the IKBY by taking this situation into consideration. At a press conference on 2 November, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül welcomed Barzani's visit to the US as normal, emphasised that "*Kurds, like Turkmens, are relatives of Turkish society*" and emphasised the joint struggle against the PKK (Radikal, 2005). In other words, the message was given that we should act together instead of recognising the IKBY.

IKBY's President Massoud Barzani's meeting with Turkish officials before his visit to countries such as the USA, the UK and Italy was/is an indication of the formalisation of relations. In the meeting chaired by Emre Taner, Secretary of MİT (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilat*ı, the Turkish National Intelligence Organisation), the future of Iraq and Iraqi Kurds, border security and the situation of the PKK were discussed. The Kurdistan Regional Government's foreign affairs chief Sefin Dizayi, in a statement to a Turkish channel about the meeting, stated that they wanted to establish relations with Turkey and said: "*The Kurds and the IKBY form a critical part of the Iraqi government and the Iraqi constitution gives us the right to develop bilateral relations. Of course, developing relations will ensure this. Good luck*." In fact, this model gave the Turkish authorities the idea that establishing relations between our country and the IKBY

would not be against the Iraqi constitution and that they could pursue policies independent from the central government.

Ahmet Davutoğlu's influence on Turkey's IKBY policy

After taking power in 2003, the AKP's foreign policy started to be determined by the deep strategic concept put forward by Ahmet Davutoğlu as foreign policy. After 2005, when the IKBY gained autonomy according to the Iraqi constitution and this status was approved by the constitution, Turkey accepted this change in Iraq and developed a new Iraqi policy accordingly. In order to establish relations with the IKBY, Turkey tried to change the status quo and security-based perceptions that negatively affected the opening to the region in this period. In this period, while Turkey developed a strategy based on diplomacy and common interests with the Erbil administration, it was noted that the Turkmen and Kurds living in the IKBY are closely related to the Turkish society and have common cultural values, referring to the Ottoman heritage. Turkey has tried to change the old image of the region by emphasising that IKBY society is similar to Turkish society in terms of culture, religion and other social relations. In the past, the IKBY leader Masoud Barzani was seen as a tribal leader, while the region was seen as a breeding ground for the PKK and a threat to Turkey (Doruk, 2010). Davutoğlu believed that Turkey's proactive Middle East policy could be addressed by including the KRG and regional co-operation strategies to improve this image of the region (Hürriyet, 2007).

Ahmet Davutoğlu evaluated the relations with the KRG from different perspectives, approaching Turkey and the IKBY in the context of "interdependence" and focusing on common interests that could solve their problems. Davutoğlu emphasised that the problems related to the IKBY, including the problems faced by the Kurds in Northern Iraq and the region, could be solved by creating cross-border economic interdependence (Hürriyet, 2007).

In this period, the biggest obstacles for the AKP to change its policy towards the IKBY were the periodic attacks on Turkey by PKK militants, who have been based in the region since the 1980s, and the status of Kirkuk. Especially since 2006, PKK attacks against Turkey have increased and Turkish media reports that Kurdish groups in the region support the PKK have been condemned by senior Turkish officials (Doruk, 2010).

Former Pentagon official Michael Rubin, while calling for an end to the PKK's attacks against Turkey, expressed the relationship between the PKK, which receives support from Iraqi religious groups, and the IKBY as follows: "*Like Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, Barzani rebukes Turkey by not guarding the border and supporting the Kurdish Labour Party*". According to Michael Rubin, Barzani gets what he wants from America by teaching Washington that "*we are a better ally than Turkey*". He knows how to use America. And President Bush welcomes him." "The IKBY has expressed its satisfaction with the PKK harbouring groups in its territory, transporting explosives to Turkey and selling weapons and equipment at high prices.

Reports from Rubin and other sources about the relationship between the PKK and the Kurdish Democratic Party were confirmed by Turkey and created a negative perception of the Kurdish government. President Ahmet Nejdet Sezer and Chief of General Staff Yaşar Büyükanıt reacted to the increasing number of PKK attacks in Turkey, attributing them to regional Kurdish groups (Doruk, 2010).

However, as Davutoğlu emphasised, the government sees the need for closer relations with the IKBY and believes that there is a more effective strategy to fight the PKK in the region. AKP foreign policy makers believe that Iraqi Kurdish support for the PKK can be overcome through some form of co-operation. On 23 February 2007, the press release following the MGK meeting stated:

"*The security situation in Iraq and the extent of the sectarian conflict were assessed; given our central concerns about the situation in Iraq, it would be beneficial for us to intensify our political and diplomatic efforts to overcome the instability and tensions in Iraq, emphasising the importance of preserving the territorial integrity and political unity of the country, in view of the terrorist threat in Northern Iraq and the conflict over the status of Kirkuk"* (Doruk, 2010).

It is clear that Turkey desires to resolve its regional problems through dialogue. Davutoğlu, the founder of this strategy, has emphasised on all platforms that the spiritual threshold of the "red line" preventing the IKBY's approach should be crossed. Davutoğlu believes that with this strategy, Turkey's security concerns in Iraq will be resolved more easily.

After becoming Foreign Minister, Davutoğlu tried to apply the theory he developed in his work *"Strategic Depth*" to Turkish foreign policy. In his study, Davutoğlu believes that the problem stems from the fact that the borders drawn without taking into account geography, history, culture and population characteristics do not take into account geopolitical and geocultural factors (Dalar, 2016). Davutoğlu believes that the way to overcome these problems is to take into account the cultural and other elements of the Turkish region and establish closer relations through joint dialogue. In this context, Davutoğlu is the architect of Turkey's regional economic gains and believes that Turkey should utilise the region within the framework of "*Interdependence*" through political and social activities with the region, especially through economic development.

Turkey's relationship with the IKBY appears to have gained a strategic dimension as Ankara's foreign policy changed and the AKP's original "*zero problems*" policy matured. After the 2007 Habur crisis was overcome, relations matured in 2009 (Dalar, 2016).

Seeking to pursue an active policy in the Middle East, Turkey established close relations with the Kurds, a strong player in the region, in 2007. Turkey's efforts to develop close relations with the IKBY, which had been ongoing since the beginning of 2008, gained a new dimension with the visit of Ahmet Davutoğlu, an advisor to Prime Minister R. Tayyip Erdoğan, to Erbil (Balcı, 2018). 2003-2009 Ahmet Davutoğlu's visit to Erbil on 1 May 2009 after assuming the post of Foreign Minister is important for the development of relations between the two countries.

As a result of the rapprochement that started to mature in 2008-2009, Turkey started to address the Kurdish issue and received continuous support from the Kurdish regional government. This has led to the development of bilateral relations on the axis of people, Kurdish-Turkish brotherhood, close neighbourliness and fraternity. Considering its close kinship with the Kurdistan Regional Government, which is now attracting investment from all over the world, Turkey has invested heavily in the regions with these advantages (Dalar, 2016). The IKBY believed that the second term of the AKP government was important for the development of relations. In other words, the IKBY preferred the ruling AKP in Turkey to other parties for its own interests and to improve relations between the two countries.

Increasing mutual high-level visits and sustainability of relations after normalisation

After 2008, Turkey turned the initiative of the military wing in foreign policy in favour of the government and started to implement the desired active policy. In this period, Turkey has been cautious about normalising its policy towards the IKBY , trying not to draw public anger. For this reason, the Erbil administration was visited first at the level of legend, then at the level of embassies and finally at the level of ministers and prime ministers (Bilgesam, 2023).

Murat Özçelik, the special representative of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, met with Masoud Barzani in Selahattin and laid the foundation of Ankara-Erbil relations (Bilgesam, 2023). Following this meeting, Davutoğlu, who visited Erbil as Foreign Minister in 2009, emphasised the importance Turkey attached to the region and the common values between the two countries. Emphasising that both sides were satisfied with the meeting, Davutoğlu said, *"Let us not let anyone spoil this brotherly relationship that is intertwined like flesh and blood"* and emphasised the importance of improving the relations between the two countries, *"It is time to take the necessary steps. I appeal to all my Arab, Kurdish and Turkmen brothers, let's restore this whole region. Anyone leaving Basra can go to Edirne without any security concerns."*

On the other hand, Barzani expressed his satisfaction with Davutoğlu's visit, expressed his support for the recent steps taken by Turkey in the field of democratic initiatives and congratulated Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu for these steps. The year 2009 witnessed the development of relations between the IKBY and Turkey in all aspects. Following the ministers' visit to Erbil, the Consulate General was opened in Erbil and Aydın Selikan was appointed as the Consul General. Selikan described the relations between Turkey and the IKBY after he became Consul General as follows.

"Before the end of the first three months, I set a goal to bring Masoud Barzani, who had not been to Turkey for eight years, to Ankara and I succeeded. That year he came to the 29 October celebrations. The organiser hung the flag of the Iraqi Kurdish region next to our flag. The anthem of the Kurdish region "hey rekib" was played. Dozens of companies from Turkey started to make serious investments in the IKBY, Turkish Airlines flights started, banks opened branches, trade attachés started to work. Diplomacy actually followed the path drawn by businessmen, contractors and oilmen and then paved

the way. Ministerial visits became normal. On 29 March 2011, Erdoğan paid the first prime ministerial-level visit to Erbil in the history of Turkey-Iraq."

As the Consul General's words suggest, official visits between Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government have become a regular phenomenon. This means that Turkey has abandoned the status quo of the past, in which the IKBY was seen as a threat. However, some Turkish intellectuals and opposition parties felt that the opening of the Consulate General in Erbil was wrong and that it contributed to the creation of a Kurdish state. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu criticised this view, saying that "*Iraq is a united country and Erbil is an autonomous region within the framework of the Iraqi constitution".* Since there are international consulates in Erbil such as the US, the UK, China and Japan, the opening of a consulate in the region, albeit late, is necessary and can be considered as a rational initiative.

In 2011, the Turkish Prime Minister paid his first official visit to Erbil, followed by a critical visit by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to the region to discuss regional issues and measures for economic co-operation. Welcoming Erdoğan on the steps of the plane, Barzani expressed his satisfaction with the visit (NTV, 2011).

The positive messages conveyed during Erdoğan's visit were reinforced by the continuation of high-level meetings. During this period, these visits increased with the increase in PKK attacks. At Erdoğan's request, Masoud Barzani's deputy Nechirvan Barzani travelled to Ankara and had a meeting with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu on the PKK attacks and other bilateral relations (NTV, 2011). Barzani emphasised that the IKBY stood by Turkey in its fight against the PKK and condemned the PKK attacks on Turkish soldiers.

Masoud Barzani and Erdoğan discussed the "*Resolution Process*" which was on Turkey's agenda during the second term of the AKP. The two leaders took similar concrete steps

to make the process work, from attending party congresses to celebrating Newroz together in Diyarbakır.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the historic meeting in Diyarbakır, Prime Minister Erdoğan said: "*We are building a new Turkey with the spirit of 23 April 1920. We are building it together with all ethnic elements and sects. In 1920, Kurds, Turks, Arabs, Laz and Circassians briefly united in the Turkish Grand National Assembly and established the republic, and we are rebuilding a new Turkey with this spirit and spirit.*"

High-level visits continued under the presidency of Binali Yıldırım, who succeeded Ahmed Davutoğlu as prime minister. In 2017, Barzani held several meetings in Ankara and Istanbul to discuss regional issues and relations with Turkey, and the raising of the regional flag during the visit was criticised by opposition parties and the public in Turkey (Cumhuriyet, 2017). Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım stated that these criticisms were unfounded and made the following statement:

"Yesterday, we discussed the recent events in the region with the President of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Masoud Barzani, focusing on the development of the relationship between two countries, particularly in the fight against terrorism and increasing cooperation against the PKK organization. Our party is actively engaged in this fight. The Kurdistan Regional Government in Northern Iraq operates autonomously within the framework of the Iraqi constitution, with its own congress, prime minister, ministers, and separate flag. The world recognizes this. Introducing this as a new application or meditation cannot be explained as a goodwill gesture. Our country fully respects the territorial integrity of Iraq and also respects everything within the Iraqi constitution. We have not implemented or developed other diplomatic traditions, nor have we been able to introduce new methods accordingly (Cumhuriyet, 2017)."*

Critics questioned the visit, during which Turkey sought support for its military operations and fight against the PKK following the "Solution Process", as well as information sharing and cooperation on Syria and IŞİD. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım visited Erbil with the aim of further strengthening relations between Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government. AKP Diyarbakır MP Galip Ensarioğlu emphasized that Mesut Barzani is our country's strongest and most reliable ally in the Middle East during his visit to Kurdistan.

Since 2007, annual high-level visits between Turkey and the IKBY governments have become routine, facilitating the diplomatic resolution of issues between the two. Despite imposing economic sanctions in reaction to the independence referendum on September 25, 2017, Turkey did not completely cut off diplomatic channels and resumed high-level reciprocal visits in 2018. The advanced level of friendship between Turkey and the IKBY compared to other countries became evident when the independence referendum was no longer on the agenda. This is clearly seen in economic and investment relationships.

The Impact of the Arab Spring on IKBY-Turkey Relations

This turmoil in the Middle East has also had an impact on Iraq's structure and continues to do so. Particularly in the first half of 2011, violent protests in Iraq resulted in some government reforms. However, the political and security situation in Iraq is seen as unstable. Following the Arab League's decision on Syria, differences of opinion among political factions in the Iraqi government have emerged. Additionally, the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq has increased the country's sense of security, leading to debates about the adequacy of Iraq's security forces. Discussions are ongoing regarding the presence of US troops in Iraq to train

Iraqi security forces. Some political groups believe that Iraq's security forces are inadequate and withdrawal of American troops will lead to serious chaos, while others believe that Iraq is now self-sufficient. Moreover, following the events in Syria, regional polarization prevailed in Iraq, and political factions in Iraq began to reappear along ethnic, religious, and political lines. Therefore, it is important to investigate how the changes in the Middle East and attitudes towards these events have affected Iraq's domestic politics. Nuri al-Maliki's government in Iraq has been criticized by the Iraqi people for reasons such as government corruption, unemployment, inadequate public services, corrupt state institutions, and insufficient security, leading to protests against Maliki's government control.

Iraqi protesters, who reached the public through a social media platform called the "*Iraqi Revolution*", organized protest demonstrations in various provinces of Iraq, including Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Kirkuk, Anbar, Kut, and Zikar, on Friday. The events held on February 25 under the name "*Day of Anger/Anger Friday"* led to a real outburst. The Iraqi government responded harshly to the protests, escalating tensions, with 8 people reported dead and 227 injured in just one operation on February 25, 2011, according to the Iraqi Ministry of Health. While the official figure remained the same, it was announced that the damage inflicted on the protesters was even greater. A civil society organization in Iraq, protecting press freedom, stated that government forces had assaulted numerous journalists, carried out operations on some media outlets, and prevented the spread of images and information related to the protests. Despite prominent religious figures in Iraq, including Ayatollah Ali Sistani, Kazim Al-Khaire, and Mumadi Yakubi, urging the public not to protest, the increasing number of protesters put the Iraqi government in a difficult position. Initially, the number of demonstrators was reported as a few hundred, but it reached several thousand. After these events, many Iraqi government officials even

announced their departure from Iraq. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki confirmed this in a statement expressing sorrow for Iraqi officials going abroad and urging them to stay, fight for their country, fulfill the people's demands. In light of these events, a strained Maliki announced that he would evaluate the government's efforts to reduce tension among the Iraqi people and make some reforms. In this context, Maliki has announced that he will review the government's work for 100 days starting on Sunday, February 27, 2011, reduce his own salary, and increase food aid for the elderly and the poor. Additionally, Maliki blamed Saddam Hussein loyalists for the incident. Following this, during a demonstration in Zikar, 3 people claiming to be members of the Baas Party were arrested for allegedly inciting the incident.

Among the cities where protests were held in Iraq, a demonstration covering all of Iraq and spreading its impact in the political, economic, and social fields was organized in Kerkük. In the demonstrations in Kerkük, 2 people died and 51 people were injured. Moreover, in the predominantly Arab district of Hawija in Kerkük, 22 people were injured and 1 person died. Tensions rose among Arab tribes after protesters tried to set fire to the municipality building in Hawija following the incident. Kirkuk security forces intervened as Sahwa armed forces attempted to enter the city center of Kerkük.

Climate of distrust in IKBY-Turkey relations after the Arab Spring

It is known that various conflicts occurred in cities such as Kerkük, Musul, and Süleymaniye in Iraq, especially in the IKBY region, following the Arab Spring. After the incident, the regional Kurdish administration, Peşmerge forces, advanced towards the south of Kerkük and stationed at the entrance to the city center. In addition, the Kerkük Governorate also declared a curfew in the city. Tensions between the local administration and ethnic groups have increased in Kerkük since the protests.

In order to calm this tension, changes were made to the administration in Kerkük, with Necmettin Kerim appointed as the governor of Kerkük and Hasan Turan as the president of the provincial council. In fact, the statement in the Kerkük province legislation passed in 2008, regarding the presidency of the regional council of Kerkük being given to the Turkmen, was postponed but eventually accepted. However, these changes did not reduce tensions in Kerkük. Especially Arab groups opposed the changes in the administration of Kerkük, accusing Turkmen and Kurds of collaborating against them. It can be said that this tension is still ongoing. Particularly, the violence and kidnapping incidents targeting Turkmen in the city of Kerkük have drawn attention to the region recently.

In March 2011, it was understood that the Iraq issue could not be resolved within the 100-day period desired by Maliki. At the end of the 100-day period, it was not feasible to obtain positive results from the government's efforts. As political groups within the government continued to disagree, new options began to emerge for Iraq's political future. In particular, the list winning the elections on March 7, 2010, indicated that the Iraqi government had lost its function and needed to go for early elections. It was said that Maliki would form a majority government. On the other hand, it was estimated that the Sadr Group could form a majority government with Iraqi IKBY and KYB. However, the high level of discord between Sadr's group and Iraqi and Kurdish groups, especially considering the presence of US troops in Iraq, made it more reasonable for Maliki's government to have the majority. Despite all these claims, the Iraqi government failed to find a solution to the crisis.

The Kurds are dispersed across four countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Kurdish attempts to establish a state have continued in the past. It is believed that the first post-Islamic Emirate/Kurdish states (941-1014) were Al-Hasnaviye

Province, (951-1088) Shaddiye Province, and (982-1097) Mervaniye Province.

The Model (Qadi Muhammad) 1946 declared the first autonomous Kurdish Mahabad Republic in Iran after World War II. However, it only lasted for about 10 months without international support. Although the Soviet Union initially supported the administration, it later withdrew its support and made agreements with the Iranian Shah. Kurds have long sought ways to establish an independent Kurdish state with international recognition, and this was achieved by the Bedirhan movement in 1842, the Yezdanşer movement in 1853, the Ubeyd Nehri movement in 1880, and the Mahmut movement in 1880 by establishing Kurdish regions within the country. In 1919, Mahmut Hafid, in 1920 Simko Şikaki, in 1925 and 1937 Şeyh Said. In 1943 Seyit Rıza, in 1943 Mustafa Barzani, and in 1961 Mustafa Barzani, in 1943 again Mustafa Barzani, in 1946 Kadı Muhamed Gazi witnessed many movements and actions like the Mahabad Republic being founded. These revolutions did not lack the personal favor of some leaders like Mahmut Hafid, Simko, and İzzettin Şer who established their own emirates (family or tribe). On 06.07.2017, Masoud Barzani made an official statement agreeing with the political parties in Kurdistan to hold a referendum on 25.09.2017 for the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Today is a symbolic day linked to the September Revolution declared against the Iraqi regime by his father (Mustafa Barzani). Since then, political circles inside and outside Iraq have been speculating about the implications of the referendum. This report attempts to examine the political background surrounding the referendum, the reasons behind its organization, the response to date, possible post-event options, and the impact of the referendum on the Kurds and regional neighbors. Turkey has considered the referendum decision "dangerous", "a serious mistake", and "playing with fire", but has not contemplated military intervention or

economic boycott if the region declares independence, and Turkish officials' statements should target convincing Turkish nationalists instead of the region. Bilateral economic, political, and security relations are at a high level, especially Iran's expansion and stance against the PKK, and Turkey is expected not to sacrifice this for referendums and independence. The region emphasized that it will not implement the referendum and independence decisions, will not close its borders, and will not cut the oil pipelines in the Ceyhan region.

Turkey has adopted a new strategy to eliminate the PKK threat in northern Iraq and conduct cross-border operations. As a result, military bases have been established in areas where the terrorists have been killed, pushing the militia further away from northern Iraq. This has led to the PKK becoming more involved in urban life under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq. Understanding that the PKK is trying to increase its influence over the lands it has lost in Turkey and Northern Iraq, the IKBY has intensified its pressure strategy by constructing new military bases around PKK camps. This has resulted in armed confrontations between the PKK and the IKBY Peshmerga forces. Reports of cooperation between the IKBY and Turkey in the operations in northern Iraq have also contributed to the escalation of conflicts.

Regarding the relationship between the KRG and the PKK, Turkey's stance after 2011

The lands that have been under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire for centuries and the successor to the Ottoman Empire, Turkey and Iraq, emerged as two separate nation-states at different times. While Iraq's struggle for independence developed alongside the British, the Kurds in the region attained their current autonomous status through a series of rebellions and collaborations against the existing government. Iraq first emerged from Ottoman control under British sovereignty in 1920 and then became an independent state on October 3,

1932, joining the League of Nations. Similarly, the Republic of Turkey established through the War of Independence on April 23, 1920, became an independent state and obtained its place in the international arena.

The initial relations between Ankara and Baghdad were based on security concerns. The first diplomatic initiative was made in 1926 to extradite fugitives due to the Kurdish rebellion. These relations continued after Iraq gained independence in 1932. The two states collaborated first in the Sadabad Pact in 1937 and then in the Baghdad Pact in 1955 to ensure their security. The development of relations between the two countries began in the 1960s when Turkey adopted a new approach to the Middle East. Turkey's Iraq policy is defined within the framework of Middle Eastern politics. The first part of the research briefly describes Turkey's general policy in the Middle East, followed by a discussion of Iraq's general economic situation and the state relations between our country and Iraq.

Attempts by the West to isolate Turkey due to the Cyprus issue after 1960 led Turkey to develop closer relationships with other Arab countries, especially Iraq. Turkey's support for Arabs during the Arab-Israeli wars between 1960-1980 changed Turkey's traditional image as a Western ally in the eyes of Arabs, opening the way for political and economic relations with Arab countries.

When describing Turkey's relations with Iraq, it is impossible to overlook the Middle East politics. This is because stating that a country's relations with another country develop independently of the other countries in the region would not be an accurate statement. It becomes even more significant when these states share a common culture. Like other states in the Middle East, both Turkey and Iraq are two states with similar ethnic composition. For example, there are many Kurds and Arabs living in Turkey. On the other hand, while the ratios may vary in Iraq, Syria, and other Arab countries, both Kurds

and Turks live there. Before the 1990 Gulf Crisis, Turkey did not have direct contact with the Kurdish government and sent messages through Baghdad to the region. However, after the Gulf War, Turgut Özal negotiated with the Kurdistan Regional Government. In these discussions, the concern over the deployment of PKK militants to the north of Iraq was directly conveyed to the IKBY leaders. Since 1983, Turkey has carried out numerous air operations in Northern Iraq to address these concerns. These activities have occasionally led to tension with both the IKBY and the central government.

Since 2007, the AKP has been pursuing neoliberal policies and investing across the globe. During this period, Turkey, one of the most rapidly developing economies, has closely engaged with the IKBY as an investment hub throughout Iraq. Sending high-level executives to the region during this time has given a unique aspect to the relationship between the two countries. Turkey has shifted towards a more collaborative policy from its old classic security-based policy towards the region. Turkey's close relationship with the IKBY has significantly increased the satisfaction of Kurds in the region, particularly those in Turkey, and has positively impacted Turkey's problem-solving process. Kurds have supported this process, with Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani visiting Diyarbakir. On the other hand, investments in the Kurdistan Region have contributed to the economic development of Gaziantep and other eastern and southeastern cities. The volume of trade between the region's cities and the Kurdistan Region has increased. While Turkey has been enhancing its economic relations with the Kurdistan Region, it has also continued to align its security policy with it.

Under the ruling AKP in Turkey, a neoliberal process has been initiated, resulting in the privatization and globalization of the economy. Since 2007, Turkey has moved away from its traditional policy of viewing the Kurdistan Regional Government as a threat, despite concerns about the PKK, and initiated a new relationship that benefits the region. These

relationships have strengthened the newly formed Kurdistan Region while providing our country with numerous social and economic benefits. Turkey's approach to Kurds and its close relationships with them have also positively increased the loyalty of Kurds in Turkey to the state, conveying the message that Turkey does not have enmity towards Kurds through these policies (Dalar, 2016).

While maintaining close relations with the Kurdistan Region, Turkey has rejected the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in the region. It considers that Kurdish citizens may make similar demands in such a situation. Therefore, by emphasizing Iraq's territorial integrity, Ankara seeks to prevent the Kurdistan Region from developing policies within this framework (Yıldız, 2017). Ankara closely monitors developments in the region and determines its policies accordingly.

In recent times, the Kurdish government's policy of establishing an independent Kurdish state has caused discomfort in Turkey (Yıldız, 2017). Turkey has warned the Erbil administration that their move towards independence is in violation of the Iraqi constitution and will negatively affect mutual relations. However, despite reactions from Turkey and the international community, the Erbil administration conducted an independence referendum on September 25, 2017. This initiative has strained Turkey-IKBY relations to a breaking point. Essentially, Turkey's close relations with the Kurds have been hindered by the process of IKBY transitioning into a state that could expand its autonomy. On September 25th, the Kurdistan Regional Government held an independence referendum, acknowledging Turkey's concerns. However, the impact of this change in Iraq on the Kurds in Turkey remains debatable.

The pressure for Kurdish autonomy has not led to a tendency among Kurds in Turkey to establish an autonomous structure. Instead, it has contributed to the region's integration

with Turkey. This is chiefly due to the economic relationships, where the IKBY Autonomous Region has generally had more economic ties with Turkey than with Iraq. The integration between Turkey and the IKBY governments, which share cultural similarities, has been seamless and swift. For example, despite having no relations with the IKBY before 2007, by 2017, around 80% of Turkey's exports to Iraq were going to the IKBY government, driven by the migration of thousands of Turkish citizens to the region. Therefore, maintaining relations by safeguarding mutual interests would be beneficial for both sides.

RESULT

One of the key factors determining Turkey's relationship with Iraq is the presence of the PKK in Iraqi territories. Since 1980, the PKK has been based in the scattered northern regions of the region and has used hit-and-run tactics against Turkey. The organization has been using an expanding region in northern Iraq as a sanctuary since launching attacks against Turkey. Militants who have become a security problem for both countries have made cooperation between the two countries necessary within the framework of security. However, Syria and Iraq have not hesitated to use this organization, which sometimes poses a threat to them, as a deterrent against our country. Therefore, as the organization approaches its objectives in Iraq and Syria, it has become a bigger problem for Turkey.

After the eight-year Iraq-Iran war that began in the early 1980s and Iraq's annexation of Kuwait in August 1990 declaring it as the 19th province, a new process began in the Middle East. This process heralded new changes in the Middle East while paving the way for world powers to intervene in Iraq. The Western powers led by the United States ended the occupation of Kuwait by inflicting heavy defeats on the Iraqi army after Saddam Hussein was not removed from Kuwait. The region, rich in oil resources, is very important for Westerners.

After the occupation of Kuwait, the Saddam regime, believing that the Kurds in Northern Iraq had betrayed him as in the Iran-Iraq war, initiated a new attack against the Kurds. Following these attacks, a refugee influx to Turkey began to prevent past genocide-like events such as the 1988 Halabja and Anfal massacres. With Turkey's initiative, a safe zone was created in the north of the country under the leadership of the United States, and after the invasion of Iraq by America in 2003, the region of the IKBY was completely abandoned, which was confirmed by the 2005 Iraq constitution.

In Turkey's struggle against the PKK, the Kurdish regional government has placed more importance on this process. Since 2005, PKK has attempted to transcend its terrorist designation by negotiating with the legally recognized Kurdistan Regional Government (IKBY) in Iraq amidst changing dynamics in the region. Given that the majority of the region's population is ethnically and geographically Kurdish, Turkey's strategy of dealing with Kurds within the Kurdish axis is logical. Despite its close relationship with the IKBY, Turkey has never ignored the central government. During a period when the IKBY pursued a policy of creating its own problems, Turkey turned its attention to the central government instead. This strategy gave the impression that Turkey could develop policies according to the situation with the two administrations.

A need for a multifaceted foreign policy in Turkey in the axis of Iraq emerged with the division of Iraq after the US invasion. The constitutional reform referendum in 2005 altered the shape of the KRG, which sought dominance in the northern region and gained legal status in Iraq. In parallel to this process, Turkey established diplomatic relations with the IKBY government and has maintained these relations to this day. Turkey's close relationship with the IKBY government is in line with the Proactive foreign policy pursued by Ahmet Davutoğlu under the AKP. Neoliberal policies that spread worldwide from 1998 were also approved and implemented

by the AKP government starting from 2000, supporting the Proactive foreign policy advocated by Ahmet Davutoğlu. As a result of this policy, investments in Turkey increased, contributing to many mega projects supporting both the public and private sectors. Particularly in the construction sector, Turkey developed rapidly, competing with China in the field of contracting. Turkish contractors, starting investments worldwide, showed intense interest in the IKBY, known as a safe haven in the Middle East.

Since 2007, Turkey has established close relationships with many countries, primarily Iraq and Syria. The "Arab Spring" that began in the Middle East since 2010 has put our country in a difficult position in its relations with authoritarian countries in the Middle East. The failure of the Arab Spring in regions like Egypt and Syria brought Turkey's relations with these countries to a breaking point. Despite occasional crises, our country has managed to maintain its economic relations with the IKBY throughout these periods.

Turkey has achieved significant results in promoting investments and closing the trade deficit in the region by establishing close political relations with the Erbil Regional Government. Until 2014, 75% of Turkey's exports to Iraq were made from the areas under the control of the IKBY. This proportion indicates how important trade is for Turkey in terms of the KRI government. Similarly, the IKBY, striving to develop itself, has begun to develop economically by receiving the necessary economic support from our country. On the other hand, due to its strategic position as the gateway connecting the IKBY to the world, it is dependent on Turkey in terms of transportation networks. In order to reduce this dependency, the IKBY has considered constructing a new transportation route through Syria and Iran. While the elements that keep Turkey-IKBY relations warm are mainly economic and cultural factors, events that lead to a deterioration of relations are mostly due to political events such as political dialogue and

external and internal dynamics. The PKK militants, who have a significant influence in the Kurdish-controlled areas, are at the forefront of the developments affecting Turkey's relations. Turkey opposes the use of these regions as a refuge by PKK militants and expects the IKBY leadership to take a clear and sincere stance against the PKK. However, neither the Iraqi central government nor the IKBY administration has been able to address our country's concerns. In this context, Turkey has carried out numerous operations in the region since the 1980s to eliminate the PKK threat it faces.

These operations have led to tensions with the IKBY administration. Incidents negatively affecting relations, often related to the Kurdish PKK activities in the region, despite Turkey's national integrity being threatened by "Turkish red lines", are due to the Barzani administration exceeding legal limits in independence-leaning moves and the IKBY's inability to resolve the status issue, leading to uncertainty about the future of disputed areas, especially Kirkuk. The future of Turkmen living in the region is not guaranteed, and uncertainties arise, such as acts of persecution against Turkmen, straining relations. On the other hand, despite Ankara's reaction, Barzani's administration proceeding with the independence referendum on September 25, 2017, has brought relations to a breaking point. Turkey has shown a strong reaction when Erbil cut off ties following the referendum, imposing certain sanctions. Despite debates on sanctions that could economically burden the IKBY, actions like closing the Habur border crossing and oil flow points have not been implemented. Turkey hopes the IKBY administration, which has followed a smart and pragmatic policy during this process, will take a step back. When the Federal Court of Iraq declared the initiative illegal and rejected it, tensions between the two sides decreased. The economic relationship of the IKBY with the government has given Turkey the opportunity to play the economic sanction

card. Therefore, Turkey has been able to employ "soft power" elements rather than "hard power".

Turkey, which plays a crucial role in the Middle East region, should enhance its economic and political ties with the region while maintaining its national unity without compromising, "within the framework of mutual interests", it should continue its close relationship with the IKBY. Otherwise, attempting to isolate the region would put the Kurdish Regional Government in a difficult position and create economic losses and challenges for Turkey in its fight against the PKK in terms of security policy. Regional isolation policy benefits countries in the region such as the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Israel, and Syria in the medium and long term. Therefore, Turkey should further expand its economic and political relations with the IKBY and become a hegemonic power in the region.

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