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The Kurdish problem

The Economist's "Survey of Turkey" might serve as a motto for our discussion:

Turkey is more like a tree, with roots in many different cultures and ethnicities. In its early years it was pruned and trained to grow strictly in one direction: Turkish. Now, in its maturity, its branches tend to go their own way, seeking their own kind of light.¹

Up until the winter of 1991, there were no Kurds in Turkey, merely "Mountain Turks" – even in this definition an aspect of Turkishness was granted to the Kurds. These people, like other non-Turkish elements, were encouraged to forget their own language and culture, and undergo "Turkification." Their Kurdish heritage was to be rooted out. The Turkish media mentions that some 8,000 villages and towns have been renamed in Turkish under Article 5542 of Turkish law.² Names of mountains and lakes have been changed into Turkish. Kurdish families were asked to give Turkish names to their children. These bans and the prohibition on Kurdish publications – actually in action since the mid-1920s – were slightly lifted in 1991. Still, above all else, Turkey opposes any form of ethnic expression reflecting Kurdish nationalism or inclinations towards autonomy, within Turkey or beyond its borders. Any expression of Kurdish separatism outside Turkey was bound to stir up the millions of Kurds living within its borders – 12 million or more, out of a population of close to 65 million.

As a result of guerrilla and terror campaigns launched since 1984 by the Kurdish Workers Party (the PKK) against the Turkish authorities and Turkish civilians, the government of then Prime Minister, Turgut Ozal, proclaimed (in 1987) a state of emergency. This was imposed in seven provinces, out of Turkey's seventy-six, which are in the southeast of the country and are largely Kurdish populated. Even though power had been restored in Turkey to civil bodies and institutions in 1983 – after it had been rescinded in the 1980 *coup d'état* of General Kenan Evren – policy towards the Kurds continued to be

determined by the army. Also, in the mixed decision-making bodies the military has the upper hand when it comes to the Kurdish issue. The discussions pertaining to the Kurds made by Turkey's National Security Council (NSC) – a body that makes recommendations to the cabinet – often reflect the military stand and are rarely overruled. According to the 1982 constitution the government has to give priority to policy decisions made by the NSC.³ Philip Robins notes that personal experience induced Turkish politicians, Suleiman Demirel when serving as Prime Minister in particular, to refrain from reducing the army's role in relation to the Kurds. On two occasions, in 1971 and 1980, while officiating as Prime Minister, Demirel had been subjected to military interventions, and he preferred to avoid granting the army a pretext for intervening a third time.⁴

But much of the harm that was sustained by Turkey as a result of the Gulf War had to do with the Kurdish issue. As noted above, following the war, some 700,000 Kurds fled the Iraqi army in the direction of Turkey. Turkey alleged that Saddam chased the Kurds into its territory in revenge for Turkish aid to the coalition forces in the Gulf fighting. Bearing in mind his record, Saddam could have easily annihilated the Kurds; the fact that he chose to drive them into Turkey shows it was vindictiveness, claimed Turkey. Instead of blaming Iraq for the travails of the Kurdish refugees, Western media showed Turkish soldiers beating Kurdish refugees as they tried to cross into Turkish territory. Ankara was incensed: hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees had received assistance in Turkish army installations along the border with Iraq. Thousands more had found refuge inside Turkey itself, and Turkey had expended some 1.6 million dollar *a day* for an extended period on the welfare of these refugees.⁵

Baghdad's loss of authority in northern Iraq, when the "Safe Zone" was allotted to the Kurds, did not leave a vacuum for long. The PKK took root in northern Iraq, around the towns of Kerkuk, Sulaymaniya, Dukan, Arbil and Zakho. From there it conducted a campaign of terror against Turkey. Increasingly, in a conflict that verged on civil war, the damage was enormous, with up to sixty casualties daily on both sides. In such an atmosphere, the average Turk regarded any concession to the Kurds – even if merely social or cultural – as capitulation to terrorism and a recipe for Turkey's territorial disintegration. And, since the army dictated policy towards the Kurdish rebellion, non-military options have been removed from the range of means available to Turkey in dealing with the uprising. Turkey's own Kurds have given up moderation and a willingness to come to an understanding with, and integration into, the Turkish mainstream. Their support was gradually moving towards the PKK, the solution ultimately to pursue separation from Turkey, and the creation of Kurdish statehood. The upheaval in the southeast that in the 1970s resulted primarily from economic reasons, became politicized and, in the 1980s, violent, and even more so in the 1990s. In sum, during the 1990s, the Kurdish problem confronted Turkey with a complex challenge that threatened its territorial integrity and overshadowed its external relations.

The PKK was indeed making efforts to gain control over areas of southeastern Turkey, functioning in various domains as a fully-fledged government, thereby undermining the authority of Ankara. The government controlled enclaves of military bases, defended by armor and artillery and yet was powerless to protect people still collaborating with them. Bakers discovered delivering bread to an army base were put to death by the PKK. Fuel stations serving the authorities were set alight and the owners killed. State institutions such as Turkish Airlines, for example, have been closely guarded, operating, in effect, out of fortresses. At nightfall, virtually all semblance of Turkish rule vanished: the PKK ruled the roost. Inhabitants were required to pay taxes to the PKK, on pain of death. Many dared not serve in government-sponsored paramilitary organizations (like the Village Guards – see p. 51), or other state posts for fear of being marked “as revolutionary targets.” Local inhabitants were forbidden to join any Turkish political party. Legal matters were entrusted exclusively to “people’s courts.” The distribution or sale of newspapers published in Istanbul or Ankara was banned in Kurdish areas as was watching television. Inhabitants were required to remove television antennas “so that justice is not merely done; it is seen to be done.” Schools experienced destruction: they were regarded by the PKK as emblems of “Turkish imperialism,” belong to the “colonial assimilation system,” from which the Kurdish culture and language were omitted. Teachers who refused to resign risked their lives: forty-seven teachers were murdered in the course of 1993 alone; more than 100 teachers were murdered for teaching Turkish to Kurdish children. Altogether some 500 schools were burnt and 3,060 closed down. All types of family planning were resisted by the PKK: the organization regarded these as racist acts done by Ankara to reduce the Kurdish population in the southeastern provinces of Turkey. Gambling in any form was forbidden, as was excessive consumption of alcohol. Drunkenness was a criminal offence. In some places, the PKK enforced a total ban on the sale of alcohol. Alcohol vendors courted a fine of 50 million Turkish pounds – about 1,000 US dollars. Candidates for local elections had to have prior clearance from the PKK.⁶

The activities of the PKK were financed by millions of dollars in donations – some extracted under duress from Kurds working in Europe. (There are 500,000 Kurds living in Western Europe, 400,000 of them in Germany.) Kurdish-owned businesses, in Turkey or elsewhere, paid a “revolutionary tax.” Millions of dollars flowed into PKK coffers from the drug trade: the organization has controlled 30–40 percent of the heroin traffic from Afghanistan, Iran and Lebanon, which passes through Turkey on its way to Europe.⁷ Some 5,000 trained PKK fighters were active inside Turkey, supported by 150,000 militiamen and 2 million Turkish Kurd sympathizers. Until the early 1990s, the PKK avoided pitched battles with the Turkish army. Instead, they undertook daring raids on police vehicles and bases, officers’ clubs and other military installations. As shown below, both contenders changed radically their strategies: the PKK, using its bases in northern Iraq, began to operate as a conventional army. On its part, Turkey greatly improved its anti-guerilla warfare, but also conducted an effective conventional

war against the PKK. The moment the PKK bore more signs of a regular army and less of an underground organization, the Turkish army could exert more successfully its supremacy, resulting from it being a highly modernized conventional army now fighting another one, which only recently was an agrarian guerilla group (see pp. 43–44).⁸

Awareness of the aims and character of the conflict and the changes it has undergone are vital for an understanding of the Turkish–Kurdish problem, and of the role of the “Safe Zone” in the conflict. Abdullah Ocalan, also known as “Apo,” or “uncle” – his followers known as “Apocu’s” – founded the PKK in November 1978, when he was still a political science student at Ankara University. Indeed, Henry Barkey attributes the discovery of Kurdishness and the process of politization by students and workers of Kurdish origin, to large migration movements inside Turkey. These people, who previously had become thoroughly Turkish, migrated from the rural areas to Turkey’s metropolitan industrial and educational centers, Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara.⁹ After the September 1980 coup in Turkey, Ocalan – the name means “revenge” – fled to Lebanon. From there, and from Syria or Syrian-controlled territory, he directed the Kurdish uprising from 15 August 1984 until his capture by the Turks in February 1999. The accepted version is that the PKK rebellion had begun with the 15 August attack, in which thirty Turkish soldiers and citizens were killed.

Ocalan’s statements were pointed: “The Kemalists were wrong. They claimed to have buried the Kurds, but we tore off our burial-shrouds”; or “The whole of Kurdistan has been cleared [of its Kurdish population] by the Turks; is it so bad if the PKK clears [i.e. massacres] a few fascist villages?” These and similar utterances by Ocalan, give an inkling of the degree of hostility and brutality involved in their campaigns. (The Kurdish organization had a special trademark: it hacked off the noses of its opponents.) The PKK appeared to be the world’s most vicious terrorist underground. Some – not exclusively Turks – compared its brutality with that of the Cambodian Khmer Rouge, or Peru’s “Shining Path” underground. The PKK was held responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent Turkish Kurds, aimed at dissuading collaboration with the Turkish authorities, or drumming up support. To Ocalan at least, the objective was to reduce Turkey to a prolonged state of chaos and disorder. Such a state of affairs would ultimately provoke another military coup, putting an end to democracy and isolating Turkey in the international community. This would make foreign intervention on behalf of the Kurds more likely, resulting in the imposition of a sort of a Kurdish “Safe Haven” *inside* Turkey, similar to the one the United Nations has enforced in northern Iraq for the Iraqi Kurds. One could question the prudence of these aims and their relevance to Turkey’s realities or to the readiness of the international community to do something for the benefit of the Kurds *inside* Turkey. One way or another, according to Turkish interpretation, such a conflict as Ocalan had envisaged, was supposed to smooth the path toward the fulfillment of PKK aspirations: Kurdish self-determination.¹⁰

The Kurds have rebelled sixteen times against the Turks over the past seventy years. From the 1930s to the 1960s, their rebellions, confined to the southeastern provinces, were generally handled effectively by the Turkish authorities. The PKK rebellion launched in 1984 is the seventeenth (or the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth according to other counts).¹¹ It developed into all-out war, embracing seventeen provinces in southeastern Turkey. Of all the campaigns the Kurds have waged, that of 1984 was the longest, the bloodiest, and at times the most successful from their point of view. The total death toll so far was 34,000. The campaign has been extended to Turkey's main cities and tourist centers, and to West European capitals.

During its early stages the PKK prudently avoided evolving into a regular army, thereby excluding the possibility that the Turkish army would be able to exploit its military superiority. The underground's guerilla forays and vicious terrorism destabilized Turkish rule in the southeastern provinces, preventing the region's economic development. In particular, the PKK targeted the GAP water development project in Turkey's southeast because, among its objectives, the GAP is designed to restrict the Kurds' nationalist zeal by moderating the social and economic discrimination of which they complain.

If the exploits of the seventeenth Kurdish uprising were exceptional, Turkish repression was equally extreme and unprecedented. Alas, it goaded entire Kurdish populations, hitherto passive, into active support for the underground. The Generals' coup of 1980 took the anarchy and violence of the late 1970s as a pretext for military intervention in domestic politics. The Turkish response thus made the 1980 coup a turning point in the Kurdish campaign, with counter-terrorism at its strongest in the entire history of the Turkish republic. The Kurdish uprising, likewise a turning point, could thus be largely attributed to the excessive nature of Turkish counter-measures which followed the 1980 coup. A vicious circle had thus been created.

Escalation of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict sidelined moderates on both sides. The PKK appeared to be the sole option open to the Kurds. Kurdish leaders displayed growing disdain for the Turkish state and their declarations were increasingly separatist. Mass demonstrations, strikes in city centers, and protest actions attracted ever-growing numbers from the Kurdish community in Turkey and elsewhere. The red, yellow and green colors of the Kurdish flag – banned in Turkey – have been increasingly evident in the Kurds' dress and publications. The Kurdish challenge is not sustained exclusively by local motivation; the conflict with Turkey is not the only ground from which it emerges. It draws upon worldwide demands for greater democracy, and the erosion of all-embracing ideologies such as communism or Kemalism, with their intolerance of non-conformists and minorities. In this respect, the Kurdish uprising did not differ from a broad global tide that reflected a desire for greater ethnic and national self-expression.¹²

The "Safe Zone" in northern Iraq

The "Safe Zone" in northern Iraq, along with the various interpretations placed on it by the parties involved, also represents a turning point in the Kurdish-Turkish conflict. In the PKK view, Kurdish soil has been, for the first time, under Kurdish rule; for the first time, Kurds are enjoying the trappings of statehood and sovereignty over territory. From this to statehood, the distance could be short. Ostensibly, the PKK use of this territory as a base of anti-Turkish forays improved the Kurd positions in their campaign for an independent Kurdistan. But unlike the PKK, the Kurds of northern Iraq – grasping the "Safe Zone's" dependency upon Turkey – interpreted their control thereof as something *less* than a state. Moreover, the Kurds of northern Iraq, Massoud Barazani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in particular, have gone so far as to collaborate with the Turkish government against the PKK. Their dependency upon Turkey is total with regard to supplies as well as to defense against Iraqi attacks.

Matters were even more complex: since October 1991, Turkish territory has hosted a multination air force, composed largely of American planes and troops, but also including crews and air crafts from France, Britain and Turkey, under Turkish and American command. Their mission is the defense of the "Safe Zone." Turkey has a veto with regard to operations over Iraqi territory. Furthermore, there is a decades-old understanding between Baghdad and Ankara regarding the need to restrict – or crush – any expression of Kurdish national aspirations. The integrity of Turkey and Iraq would be prejudiced should an independent Kurdistan emerge on their territories. A classical expression of this understanding is the protest from Baghdad – invariably belated and lukewarm – against the Turkish army's forays into Iraqi territory in its operations against the Kurdish rebels.

For its part, Turkey could not help perceiving the qualitative benefits the "Safe Zone" offered the PKK in its anti-Turkish operations. Moreover, these benefits also affected the Kurds in Turkey. Their resounding dissatisfaction, now expressed more overtly and extensively than ever before, could be attributed in part to the effect transmitted by the "Safe Zone." A *de facto* Kurdish entity has emerged in northern Iraq, and it would be foolish to assume that it has no effect upon the feelings of discrimination of Turkey's Kurds or their national aspirations.

The "Safe Zone" far exceeds its post-Gulf War role as a dumping ground for Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq. It now boasts some of the trappings of statehood, including an elected parliament that represents the 3.6 million Iraqi Kurds who live there (a sixth of Iraq's population). But it faces grave problems, whose solutions entail cooperation with Turkey against the PKK, for it is Ankara that has enabled the zone to survive its difficulties with Baghdad. During the 1990s Iraq itself was under siege, and not only denied the zone foodstuffs and medicines, but left it open to incursion and agricultural theft. The zone receives Western aid supplies (150 million dollars annually) through the Turkish border.

In effect, this dependency requires the Kurds to make do with autonomy, rather than statehood: local Kurds fear that proclamation of a state would result in their abandonment by Turkey and the West. The consequence is paradoxical. The Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq will survive as long as it is under threat from Saddam Hussein, and has not been taken over by the PKK. When the Iraqi threat is removed, the Western multinational air force will withdraw. Should the PKK gain control, Turkey will take action against the "Safe Zone." This bizarre rationale leads the Kurds of the "Safe Zone" to collaborate with the Turkish government against the PKK. As *The Economist* put it: in return for a measure of independence in the "Safe Zone," Iraqi Kurds were willing to sacrifice millions of Turkish Kurds.¹³

The gravest outcome is the conclusion drawn by the Ankara authorities. From Ankara's point of view, experience with the "Safe Zone" and the qualitative changes it has introduced into the conflict, merely demonstrate that if this is how matters evolve from Kurdish autonomy outside Turkey's borders, they can only get worse should any kind of Kurdish entity be established actually on Turkish soil. Moreover, the aggravation of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict that followed the Gulf War caused many Turkish army circles to believe that perhaps it would be in Ankara's interest to have the Iraqi army back in northern Iraq.¹⁴

Worthy of further consideration is the rift between the Kurds of northern Iraq and the Turkish Kurds, including the PKK. The PKK regards the "Safe Zone" as a liberated Kurdish territory, meaning, in effect, that it advocates the dismemberment of Iraq, whereas the Iraqi Kurds want a united Iraq and, as noted, are prepared to settle for autonomy. But the PKK also attempted to prevent the transportation of supply trucks from Turkey into the "Safe Zone." As a result, the inhabitants of the zone charge that Saddam Hussein, who is equally interested in undermining the "Safe Zone," supports the PKK.¹⁵

But there are other reasons for the rift between the Turkish Kurds and their Iraqi brethren. Having long been denied Kurdish cultural expression, most Turkish Kurds are no longer able to read or write their own language. They even encounter difficulties in talking with their Iraqi brethren. For instance, Abdullah Ocalan, who was born in 1949 in the province of Sanliurfa in southeast Turkey, speaks Turkish but has only a poor grasp of some Kurdish dialects. ("Apo . . . did not know Kurdish when I met him in 1991. In our interview at the [Syrian controlled Lebanese] Bekaa he told me that he speaks Turkish, gives orders in Turkish and think in Turkish.")¹⁶ Turkification and urbanization have made Turkish the language of the Kurds of Turkey's cities, although Kurdish is still spoken in the villages. As a result, thousands of modern concepts are conspicuous by their absence from the Kurdish spoken in Turkey. Nor are there in Turkey any Kurdish translations of literary works. The Kurds of Iraq, on the other hand, were too strong, and too concentrated, to be successfully subjected to cultural "Iraqification." They preserved their language and culture, employing the Arabic alphabet which, it will be recalled, is not in use in Turkey. It is they who set the tone for "Kurdishness," and they look down on their Turkish

counterparts as illiterates. Over the centuries, countless accounts have pointed to disunity, tribalism, and factionalism as the prime reasons for the Kurds' failure to achieve self-determination. Their dispersion among five states (Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and parts of the former Soviet Union) ensures that the concern of each country for its integrity induces the five to make common cause in repressing the Kurds.

Even the Kurdish language, which should have served to unify the different branches of the Kurdish people, uses dissimilar dialects and, as referred to previously, different alphabets: Arabic in Iraq, Latin in Turkey, Cyrillic in the former Soviet Union. There are further divisive factors at work. The only factor unifying the Kurds is their history, and their heroic leader Salah al-Din (1139–93), Kurdish founder of the Ayyubid Dynasty that once ruled the region and captured Jerusalem from the Crusaders. The remote past, however, is inadequate to alleviate the torments of the divisive present. For example, a vicious struggle is intermittently going on between the Barazani's KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) under Jalal Talabani, for the political and economic control of the "Safe Haven."¹⁷

Various attempts at mediation over the past few years have produced only temporary truces among the Kurdish factions. The 1990s' last attempt was undertaken in Washington (August–September 1998) by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Washington, needless to say, prefers a united Kurdish front in northern Iraq, able to withstand Saddam Hussein. Talabani and Barazani – both from different regions of Kurdistan and speaking different dialects of the language – agreed on a division of the power and the income from duties imposed on goods coming into the "Safe Zone." They also agreed to hold elections: the results would determine the proportional shares of the income. A breakthrough was the KDP's stated willingness to share its greater revenues with the PUK as the first step in the process of reconciliation. The sides also endorsed a federative basis for a post-Saddam Iraq, implying a Kurdish state, within a federative Iraq.

Agreement or not, it is clear to everyone that internal Kurdish rivalries continue to tempt Saddam. Barazani and Talabani receive their oil from Iraq – part of it they sell abroad – hence, their ability to turn against Baghdad is limited. These rivalries also increase the dependence of the "Safe Zone" on the West and on Turkey, and certainly weakens Kurdish interests vis-à-vis Turkey. Each and all of the Kurdish factions are interested in joining forces with some country or some neighboring elements – including Baghdad – in order to gain some advantage over the other factions, even if it is only temporary. That is what happened in August of 1996 when Barzani joined up with the Iraqi army to defeat the Talaban.

As Alan Makovsky explains, Turkey and its neighbors prefer the Kurds being divided, and certainly worry deeply about the possible emergence of an independent or even autonomous Kurdish entity in Iraq that would further fuel separatist sentiments among their own Kurdish communities, Turkey in particular. Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Turkey will eventually object to the Barazani–Talabani agreement and try to undermine it.¹⁸

Turkey and the Kurds: Ankara's response

Overall, official Turkish reaction to the Kurdish problem could be divided into its social, economic and, more prominently, military responses. Ankara concluded that in order to assure a successful economic revival of the southeastern provinces – home of half of its Kurdish population – it was vital to eliminate the PKK. The PKK, for its part, realized that its own success depended, *inter alia*, on foiling Turkish policy to reduce the disparities between the Kurds and the rest of the population. Accordingly, as mentioned earlier, the GAP project became a “Fascist Target” for PKK attacks.

In fact, GAP's success has yet to be seen. The construction of dams and reservoirs on the Euphrates entailed the inundation of hundreds of Kurdish villages, forcing thousands of Kurds off their land and filling Turkey's cities with disgruntled proletarian and petit bourgeois elements. Designed to reduce disparities between Turks and Kurds, so far GAP has succeeded in lining the pockets of landowners and tribal chiefs, without raising the living standards of the Kurdish peasant masses. It is questionable whether Ankara will succeed, in the foreseeable future, in ameliorating the lot of its millions of Kurdish subjects.

All the data concerning figures for the Kurds are slanted, either for or against Kurdish aspirations. Official Turkish statistics set the number of Kurds at 7.1 percent of the overall population, i.e. less than 5 million out of 65 million. The Kurds claim to constitute 24 percent. Other estimations give any number between 10 and 20 million Kurds who live in Turkey. A figure appearing to be true would be around 13 percent, or about 9 million. (A 1999 nationwide survey has found that only 1.4 percent of Turkish citizens identified themselves as Kurds.)¹⁹ A large majority living in the big cities of western and central Turkey and are part of mainstream Turkish life. Six million to 8 million Kurds live in the southeast and eastern provinces. Natural increase among the Kurds is high – 3.8 percent annually in rural areas, 2.9 percent in the cities. The Turkish average in the early 1990s was of 2.7 and 2.4 percent, respectively. The dramatic decline in the Turkish average at the end of the 1990s – which stood at 1.5 percent – is not matched by a similar Kurdish reduction.

The Kurdish populated southeast Turkey – where some 15 percent of the population live – has always been a poor area. It produces only 4 percent of Turkey's GDP and 2 percent of its industrial output. Unemployment in the Kurdish sector is 25 percent – double the rate for the rest of the country. Per capita income of the Turks is double the Kurdish average. Actually, per capita income in the Kurdish provinces is as low as one-tenth that of Istanbul. According to the United Nations' latest Human Development Index, Turkey as a whole is ranked seventy-fourth among the countries of the world, with a point value of 0.778 (on a scale of zero to one). The index for southeastern Anatolia is as low as 0.585 points. And while the average number of Ankara students per class is seventy, and per teacher twenty-nine, it is eighty-six in the southeastern town of Sirnak. The value of per capita bank deposits in Turkey as a whole was 167 million Turkish

lira (TL), i.e. 417.5 dollars (at the beginning of 1999). The figure for the south-east is as low as TL10 million (25 dollars). Some figures further illustrate the gap between Turkey's west and east. While per capita income is 7,882 dollars in Kocaeli, an industrial and commercial center an hour away from Istanbul, it is merely 774 dollars in the eastern province of Agri. A southeastern Anatolia family's average monthly income was TL30 million (75 dollars) at the beginning of 1999, which is much lower than the national monthly minimum wage of TL78 million (195 dollars). One can safely sum up that Turkey's rising prosperity since the 1980s (see [Chapter 3](#)), has bypassed the largely Kurdish southeastern provinces. Aegean and Mediterranean cities flourish while rural Anatolia remains backward. Indeed, a Turkish officer who had been fighting the PKK, and thus became acquainted with the population in the southeastern provinces of Turkey, described the situation there as "being alive is the only luxury that the people of these areas have."²⁰

As already noted and further illustrated by these grim statistics, Turkey's non-military response to the conflict with the Kurds has been marginal, largely confined to sporadic efforts to bridging social and economic gaps, while ignoring the problem's national aspects. Dogu Ergil from Ankara University, explained that there is no "Kurdish Question" in Turkey but a "Turkish Question;" "Kurdishness cannot be properly placed within the Turkishness that constitutes the basic attributes of citizenship in the Republic of Turkey."²¹ Soon after the First World War, with the loss of Arab provinces, the Armenian community, the population exchange with Greece, etc., the Turkish official inclination towards pluralism of cultures was abandoned. Unity, uniformity, and the ideology of Turkish nationalism were created as a method of nation-building. When citizenship was based on Turkishness, members of other ethnic groups living in Turkey had to accept it, keeping, if they wished, the religious and cultural parts of their ethnic group and peacefully or forcefully losing the non-cultural-religious parts (i.e. political and national identities). Accordingly, during the twentieth century millions of Kurds have integrated into the Turkish society, economy, culture, and politics. Two million marriages were held between Turks and Kurds.²²

Still, 90 percent of the Kurds living in Turkey in the 1920s were living along tribal lines under the strong control of powerful Kurdish landlords (*agas*). The tribal cleavages persisted and were further aggravated by keen competition for meager resources. Unity – neither Turkish, not even Kurdish – did not prevail. Successive uprisings that started in 1925 led southeastern Turkey to live in constant strife and under a state of siege. The area was out of touch with the rest of the society. The government invested little in an area that it did not trust much, explained Dogu Ergil. Poverty and detachment, together with the traditional character of the southeast rendered the area the least integrated part of Turkey.²³

It was not until the early 1970s that a strong Kurdish movement appeared on the political scene. Kurds cooperated then with the Kurdish leftist movement. The harsh bans (e.g. on the use of the Kurdish language, television and

radio, as previously mentioned) imposed by the military were lifted in 1991, but rejection of Kurdish education continued. When Turkey's left – the only available place for Kurds to express opposition – had been crushed by the military, the more militant Kurds opted for an armed struggle. In this atmosphere the PKK was conceived (in 1978), based on a contradictory Marxist-Leninist-Kurdish-Muslim national ideology, and the acts of terror began (in 1984).

Following harsh counter-measures that the Turkish government took, the PKK was seen as the sole road for many Kurds. The hit-and-run and guerrilla tactics that the PKK employed in the mountains of southeast Turkey seriously damaged the ill-prepared Turkish troops. The tide turned against the Kurdish organization only in the early 1990s, when the PKK moved into larger units and applied conventional warfare, thereby facilitating the supremacy of Turkey's conventional army. Also, useful intelligence was collected from the "Safe Zone" by Turkish units as well as by forces belonging to the Operation Provide Comfort. It enormously helped in neutralizing the PKK bases there. Specially trained Turkish commando, police and helicopter units were made available for combat, equipped with the appropriate gear. Then Turkey managed to confine PKK activity to specific rural areas and, eventually, got the upper hand in those places as well.

The turning point in the confrontation with the PKK was the summer and winter of 1991, i.e. at the time of the Iraqi defeat in the Gulf War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, with both events closely linked to the waning of the cold war. The weakening of Syria that resulted from Moscow disassociating itself from its former allies also helped the Turkish strategists in their stage B of their anti-PKK campaign. Pulverizing the Kurdish resistance internally (stage A) was followed by the crushing of international support given to the PKK, be it by raids deep into northern Iraq or by intimidating Syria (see pp. 44, 48–49). Much of the Turkish force previously deployed along the Turkish-Iraqi and the Turkish-Soviet borders – about 200,000 troops – was assigned to the war against the Kurdish underground. Conventional warfare tactics and weapons that for years were directed at the threats that Turkey faced from its neighbors and from its cold war commitments had to be redirected to the mountains and the guerillas. Politically, the home front became favorable and the determination to beat the PKK by military means increased with the death of Turgut Ozal (1993). The latter was the last Turkish politician to advocate other than purely military means to end the Kurdish violence. The Turkish military then took the lead, viewing the PKK as a strategic threat – formerly there were various opinions as to the type of problem Turkey was facing (riots, a local uprising, a limited insurrection, etc.) – and that strategic threat had to be crushed by any means. Thus, a combination of domestic and external factors assisted Turkey to victory over the PKK.

A number of major initiatives helped the Turkish military. The first, which started in 1995, was the importance of consolidating an area, how remote it was, how hectic it was, and how demanding it was to keep a permanent military

presence there. A visitor to Turkish troops holding a remote position in the southeast of the country described the miseries the soldiers had to endure: "You are lying in a place where 450 military personnel have only one telephone, and can take a shower only once every three weeks [and] without seeing your family for months."²⁴ The tactics of consolidating an area was not always appreciated: on several occasions troops moved from a base in the lowlands to a hilly area, dispersed the PKK, and returned to base. The guerrillas returned to the area and the soldiers had to repeat the operation. "Nothing can be worse for morale," commented a Turkish officer.²⁵

The second successful tactic was the employment of mixed ground and air force anti-guerrilla warfare. The combination of lightly armed, tough special forces supported by flying artillery and the flexibility and maneuverability of the helicopter were dreaded by the PKK. These teams were dispatched along the frontier with Iraq and into northern Iraq itself, denying the PKK their traditional strongholds and forcing them to fight, even in winter. In a tactic called "The Tiger Hunt," commandos worked in tightening concentric circles to trap their prey. "If you see five PKKs send in 100 troops," was the motto.²⁶ Fighting during winter in the freezing and snowy mountain crests of southeast Anatolia was clearly a revolution. Never before tried, it enabled the PKK to winter there and to prepare itself for its spring and summer offensives. The novelty caused a Turkish General to compare it to the stubborn decision of Vice Admiral Louis Mountbatten during the Second World War to thrust into the jungles of Burma during the monsoon season, another non-combat time. The third influential move was to separate the PKK, its headquarters and bases outside Turkey, both in Syria and Iraq, and by so doing curtailing the logistics the organization enjoyed (hospitals, for instance) in countries like Russia and the Ukraine. The supply lines of the PKK were thus cut off. In evicting Abdullah Ocalan from Damascus (October 1998), Turkey was implicitly assisted by its recent security contacts with Israel, and more so by the image they created on Syria. Being threatened by a potential north-south Turkish-Israeli squeeze, President Assad gave in and expelled Ocalan.²⁷ Simultaneously, the links between the PKK and external forces and foreign countries made it easy to accuse the organization of having no authentic roots in Turkey, of being manipulated by others, and of pursuing the policies of anti-Turkish international elements and ideologies. Another Turkish move that left a continuous detrimental impact on the PKK was the successful hit on the organization's leadership. Abdullah Ocalan is the most well-known case. Another case of impressive impact was the capture in April 1998 of Semdin Sakik, second-in-command of the PKK. True, there was no short of successors, yet it greatly assisted Turkey that the PKK leadership had to run for their lives or for fear of being captured by the Turkish military instead of terrorizing Turkey.

Turkey and the Kurds: cultural aspects

Kurds resident in Turkey are “Turkish citizens,” “Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin,” “people of separatist inclinations” and, as already mentioned, “Mountain Turks.” Kurds, or people of Kurdish origin, are Turks or “citizens identified as Kurds.” Kurds living in Iraq are “northern Iraqis,” or “the groups in northern Iraq,” or “citizens of northern Iraq,” or “kinsmen of our citizens on the far side of the border.” Their leaders are the “tribal chiefs of northern Iraq.” Members of the PKK are “terrorists” or “separatists.” The conflict in the southeastern provinces of the country is referred to as “the situation,” seldom “the problem.” But not “a Kurdish problem: there is only a terrorism problem,” or a “problem [which is] a product of the growing disparity in socioeconomic income level.” A broader interpretation of the issue by a Turkish newspaper introduces the reader to new and surprising inputs:

There is no problem such as the “Kurdish problem” in Turkey. However, a PKK problem, supported by the Christian West, Zionism, Russia, Greece, Syria and many others – this does exist. The Kurdish state is not what the Kurds want but what the U.S. and the E.U. want in order to establish a mandate in the Middle East. The Kurdish state is also essential for the realization of the Greater Israel and Greater Armenia projects.²⁸

Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit made it clear that the issue Turkey is faced with in its southeast is not a Kurdish problem but a lack of economic and social reforms. Ecevit explained that it was the cessation of trade with Iraq, more specifically the closure of the Habur Gate trade point in accordance with the UN economic embargo, plus Iraqi debts, that caused hardships to the region. This is the essence of the problem, not the “stories” and “legends” voiced by the PKK or by its supporters in the West. Also, “[It is not an] ‘ethnic’ or ‘Kurdish’ issue, as many Europeans like to call it. The problems and ailments of these regions are largely due to their semi-feudal heritage. In those districts of southeastern Turkey where economic and social development have reached a certain level, terrorism has visibly abated.”²⁹ In short, as Mesut Yegen put it, there is banditry, smuggling, and tribalism, but no “Kurdishness [in] the Kurdish question:”

[T]he discourse of the Turkish state necessarily reads the Kurdish question in terms of the tensions between the past and the present; tradition and modernity; the periphery and the center; Islam and reason. Being a necessary outcome of a particular discursive formation, this reading led to the Kurdish question being reconstituted as an issue of reactionary politics; of tribal resistance and of regional backwardness.³⁰

Recognition of the Kurds as a community distinct from the Turks, even negotiating with them thus acknowledging them as a distinct community, is perceived by most Turkish parties as the emergence of Turkey’s “private nightmare,” the “unravelling of a single thread, that will entail disintegration of the entire fabric.” Turkey contains fifty-one ethnic elements or religious communities distinct from

the Turkish majority. Some are tiny, like the Jewish community. Others number millions, such as the Kurds, or the Alevis. Hence, you granted the Kurds special treatment and the monolithic Kemalist conception is gravely harmed.³¹

The August 1920 Treaty of Sevres is often mentioned in Turkey, by Turkish media and by Turkish politicians, and Turks are repeatedly warned against a new Sevres. True, Sevres was never ratified but was superseded by the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, which reflected the victory of the Turks, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in their war of independence against Allied forces. But Sevres was imposed upon the Ottoman Empire by the victors in the First World War, the West, a lesson not to be forgotten in Turkey. The treaty stripped Turkey of its Arab colonies, virtually of all Eastern Thrace, of the Aegean islands, and of the Dodecanese. International control was to be set up on various Turkish ports and rivers (Constantinople, Smyrna, Alexandretta, the Maritsa River, etc.). The Straits of Istanbul and the adjacent territory on the Asiatic mainland were to be demilitarized and handed over to an international commission. Western Thrace was ceded to Greece. The Ottoman army could be no more than 50,000 strong, all aircraft were to be surrendered together with all the navy, except a few ships. In addition, the treaty granted statehood to the Armenians and local autonomy to the Kurds, at the expense of Turkey's integrity.

To many Turks, Sevres is not a name of a small French town of northern France, famous for its porcelain industry, but it is synonymous with "Munich." To this day, they are convinced that the West is merely waiting for an opportune moment to put the Sevres plan into effect. Accordingly, any utterance drawing a distinction between Kurds and Turks is unacceptable in Turkey – it is a repetition of Sevres. The anti-Sevres formula thus produces an overwhelming Kemalist unity, and excludes any deviations:

[I]nstead of smoothing relations between the various elements in our society, our political cadres have long intentionally or unintentionally encouraged the deepening of the fragmentation among those elements through left-right, secular-fundamentalist, Alawite-Sunni differentials, favoritism towards certain religious sects, political flirting with local notables, regional variations in industrialization and regional discrepancies in income distributions. The long delay in smoothing all of these disparities in society unfortunately created a suitable climate for certain external circles to play with the Kurdish card once again . . . [W]e ourselves have been partially creating a suitable climate for those dreamers, who are now getting excited that they may have an opportunity in reviving the Sevres treaty.³²

Even granting the Kurds self-rule – along the lines of the autonomy granted to Spain's minorities (e.g. the Basques) – is rejected in Turkey: "We are not the Iberian Peninsula, and our southern neighbor is not Andorra." The implication is that Turkey's neighbors are just waiting for an opportunity for territorial retribution: Syria, for example, who wants the restoration of Alexandretta. Hence, any erosion of Turkey's ethnic integrity would merely serve those ends. After all, claim the Turks – in line with Turkey's Kemalist philosophy that rules out a homeland containing more than a single nationality – the Kurds are everywhere

among us; Kurdish statehood would accordingly entail an unthinkable population exchange involving millions of Kurds and Turks. For its part, the argument continues, Turkey has never demanded autonomy, or separation, or territorial dismemberment, as a solution for the millions of Turkmens in Iraq, or the million or more Turks in Bulgaria, or the 100,000 Turks in Greece, in Western Thracia. (See [Chapter 6](#).) Why then, the question is, should the Kurds of Turkey deserve preferential treatment? They should settle for the same equal rights, and religious and cultural freedoms that Ankara asks for Turkish ethnic communities in foreign countries.³³ As is well known, the Kurds do not follow the Turkish example but insist on recognition of their rights.

The Turkish response is firm and unequivocal: the use of military force and, as described by Turkish media, the resort to a scorched earth policy. This verges, in some views, on civil war tactics. The few Turkish attempts to consider the conflict in non-military terms have failed. Even the apparent moderation exhibited by Turgut Ozal and Prime Minister Tansu Ciller, owed more to Turkey's wish to elicit favorable reactions in the West than to a genuine change of policy towards the Kurds. As already mentioned, In January 1991, just before the Gulf War, President Ozal proposed abrogation of some restrictions on Kurdish cultural and linguistic expression. In July 1995, Tansu Ciller proposed to enhance freedom of expression, implying that Kurds, too, would enjoy greater liberty.

One may expect that greater freedom of expression will enable Turkish citizens to voice criticism of their government. As for the Kurds, for the time being they do not enjoy the freedom of any kind of cultural organization – as Kurds. One can expect them to continue and labor under various restrictions. But changes do occur. For example, as of 1991 the Kurds can speak their own language. A public conversation in Kurdish or playing Kurdish music is no longer considered illegal. Other changes – some of a macabre nature – were reported in the Turkish paper, *Hurriyet*: in order to improve its image the Turkish army has decided that the bodies of Kurdish rebels will no longer be publicly displayed in the villages. Furthermore, only women or policewomen will conduct body searches on Kurdish women. Turkish soldiers have been ordered to stop bargaining in Kurdish shops. The Turkish Foreign Office also provides information about Turkish soldiers, accused of crimes against Kurdish citizens: in 1994 out of 1,194 cases, fifteen ended in conviction. In 1995, 962 cases were investigated and twenty ended in conviction.³⁴

In 1987, it will be recalled, a state of emergency was proclaimed in Turkey's southeastern provinces (Diyarbakir, Elazig, Siirt, Tunceli, Van, Batman, Sirnak). Of Turkey's four army corps, two were stationed in these provinces; over 250,000 soldiers were employed in suppressing terror and the Kurdish uprising. In pursuit of a policy designed to deny PKK rebels geographical and human shelter, the army has burned down some 30 million acres of woodland in the past decade – 25 million acres in East Anatolia alone. Over 1,500 villages were razed to the ground to deny the PKK its human hinterland. Some set the figure at 3,478 residential areas, of which 905 are villages and 2,523 are hamlets, from

which 401,328 people were evacuated. Conversely, government sources attributed this migration to economic reasons (35 percent), and to PKK oppression (60 percent). The remaining 5 percent is due to “the compulsory applications of the provincial administration.” Altogether, for reasons to be attributed to the war with the PKK or to harsh economic reasons, an estimated four million people left their villages, reducing the number of farmers in the region by 75 percent.³⁵ It has been a classical civil war, a guerilla movement fighting the central government, a secessionary war, with the objective of acquiring a slice of territory. All was fair in this civil strife: since its outbreak in the 1980s, it has taken a toll of more than 34,000 lives, subjecting Turkey to enormous economic damage and decimating its Kurdish community.

Compromise is out of the question, as it is in any civil war inspired by overriding ideologies. It is Kemalism on the one hand, Kurdish-Marxist nationalism (although the combination may seem contradictory) on the other, and the bloodshed has soared. The two sides have been moving towards a zero-sum solution, i.e. the triumph of one side, the inevitable annihilation of the other. As noted, the Turkish side is led by the army, which lays down an uncompromisingly belligerent strategy. The more Turkey’s political leaders lost face because of their failure to resolve the conflict, the greater became their tendency to leave its resolution to the army. This may spring from a wish to detract attention from their travails by indulging in military operations against a detested domestic foe or, simply, from an awareness of the probable outcome of a showdown between the politicians and the Generals. We have already quoted Philip Robins (see p. 34) about President Demirel, who had endured military interventions in his political career. It is unlikely that any Turkish politician will pick the Kurds as an issue worthy of a showdown with the Turkish General Staff. The true state of affairs – a civil war, with enormous suffering on both sides, which would end only after a protracted and hectic struggle – was well illustrated by the *Turkish Daily News*: “We hear stories every day how the PKK is beaten and crushed. We wish to know what the real story is . . . we hear plenty of empty promises.”³⁶

From the mid-1990s, the Turkish army has succeeded in keeping the Kurdish rebellion below “boiling point,” in both civilian and army-controlled areas, including in the “Safe Haven” in northern Iraq. As a result, Turkish army sources could declare: “There are no more gains to be made at the point of a gun . . . Terrorism is at an acceptable level – and now it is up to the politicians to finish the job.” Indeed, Ocalan’s suggestions, every now and then, for a cease-fire, or talks, or a federative solution that would not entail severance from Turkey (the last made in August 1998), testify to a weakening of the PKK underground. And when the internal front had been dealt with, it was easy for the Turkish victor to persuade its neighbors to stop assisting the PKK. Russia, for example, has closed down PKK logistic bases and medical centers in Yaroslav Forest (300 km from Moscow). But the main Turkish gain was on 20 October 1998 when Syria and Turkey signed an anti-terror cooperation document. Following a tough Turkish demand, within which was an explicit threat of Turkish military intervention,

Damascus agreed to stop supporting the PKK, to stop granting shelter to Ocalan, and to cause Lebanon to do the same. Part of the quid pro quo was that Turkey would stop its preventive shelling deep into the Syrian area in the Hatay region, and would remove its ambushes from there, that penetrated deep into the Syrian territory in an effort to hit at PKK bases. The Turkish–Syrian accord forbids any sort of PKK activity in Syria, even commercial activity. Surprisingly – what points to the effects of the Turkish threat – Syria agreed to stop inciting against Turkey’s close contacts with Israel. The rest is well known: Ocalan was expelled from Syria and few months later was caught by the Turks. Turkey’s readiness to enforce a showdown, whatever the price, had an effect.³⁷

Turkey has estimated the cost of its war against the PKK, as of April 1998, at 80 billion dollar. The 1998 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) fact book quotes a yearly expense of approximately 7 billion dollars, an amount that contributed to the 99 percent inflation rate for 1998 and a national debt equal to half the government’s revenue. Other sources quote a 15 billion dollar annual spending, that is an incredible 225 billion dollar spend during the fifteen-year struggle with the PKK.³⁸

Official Turkish statistics points clearly to an escalation of the war against the PKK, particularly since 1995. There is a definite parallel between Turkish offensives and PKK casualties. According to Turkish army spokesmen, of the 10,663 PKK casualties between 1987 and 1996, 7,116 were killed between 1995 and 1996. During that same two years Turkey lost 1,811 soldiers, whereas during the period 1987–96, total Turkish casualties were 3,400. The number of incidents linked with the PKK has been dropping significantly: 3,993 in 1993; 3,908 in 1994; 2,118 in 1995; 1,941 in 1996; 1,300 in 1997; and 977 in 1998. Altogether, of the 2.5 million troops that served in the force and took part in quelling the PKK uprising during its fifteen years (1984–99), a total of 5,606 soldiers, police and Village Guards were killed, 11,269 were injured, 5,316 civilians died, and an additional 5,903 were injured. During the same period 23,638 PKK members lost their lives.

In preparing their case against Abdullah Ocalan, the Turkish prosecution had furnished the court that eventually sentenced Ocalan to death, with the following statistics, relating to the period of August 1984–February 1999. The PKK staged 6,036 attacks and 8,257 armed clashes with the Turkish security forces. There were also 3,071 bomb attacks, 388 people were robbed at gunpoint and 1,046 people were kidnapped. As a result of these attacks, 4,472 civilians, 3,874 soldiers, 247 policemen and 1,255 Village Guards were killed. A total of 16,362 people were injured.³⁹

Turkey’s response to the PKK’s suggestions of a cease-fire has been unequivocal: they will not negotiate with terrorists. Ocalan’s federative proposals only increased Turkish wrath: any compromise, even the smallest, with Kurdish demands, would lead to the unraveling of the entire fabric of Turkish society. However, now that Turkey has satisfied itself that it has crushed the PKK military uprisings, both within Turkey and in the areas it controls in

northern Iraq, the international aspects of the conflict are snowballing. With each progressive decline in the extent of Kurdish terrorism, Turkey absorbs more and more international criticism for its treatment of the Kurds and their political aspirations.

Turkey did well in one and a half of the “two and a half wars” it is supposed to be fighting.⁴⁰ As noted, it reduced Kurdish terrorism (“the half war”) to a tolerable level. It reduced the threats emanating from Syria. As for Greece, Turkey was ready, it was claimed, to do battle whenever necessary. Six countries have been accused of aiding and abetting the PKK: first, Syria and Greece, then Armenia, Cyprus, Serbia and Iran. Apart from Iran, the rest practically stopped supporting the military uprising of the Kurds. However, when the war was practically over, it became easier to attack Turkey on the non-military aspects of the Kurdish question. When the PKK ceased its terrorist activity its status in certain places in Europe slowly changed from that of a “terrorist organization” to a “criminal one.”⁴¹ The subject of human rights in Turkey (see [Chapter 5](#)) is given broad media coverage due to the number of Kurds seeking political asylum in Western Europe. Tens of thousands of Kurds are fleeing, allegedly from the threats of the Turkish authorities. Between 1988 and 1997, 30,000 refugees sought political asylum in Greece, most were from Turkey, and 70 percent of these Turks claimed to be of Kurdish nationality. Ankara rejected the notion that these people were in need of a shelter, claiming instead that they merely consider Italy and Greece as the closest entrance on their way to the richer members of the EU. It also blamed Greece for accepting “terrorists and fugitives” from Turkey, while deporting immigrants and genuine asylum seekers from countries like Iraq, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.⁴²

Turkey has repeatedly protested at what it calls “the exaggeration” of the problem of Kurdish refugees by a number of European countries. It also challenged the double standards it is treated with. The PKK has been militarily weakened, but it has succeeded in stressing the political aspects of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict and gaining Western support for the recognition of its rights – to the detriment of Turkey. Mesut Yilmaz, when serving as Turkey’s Prime Minister, was upset at the way in which Europe had “romanticized” the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, turning terrorists into “freedom fighters struggling for their self-determination.” And now, that Congress in Washington is intermittently placing a condition of the sale of arms to Turkey on the improvement of human rights there, particularly with regard to the Kurds, Turkey has responded bitterly: “And is everything in Saudi Arabia perfect already?”⁴³ Understandably, expectations from Turkey are different from what is expected of Saudi Arabia.

The Turkish military put it even more forthrightly:

Regarding human rights . . . the Turkish Armed Forces are far ahead of many European nations. Unfortunately, we are facing double standards in human rights. If any member of the general staff of a European country says “we will prepare a human rights plan for the Southeast” [of Turkey, where most Turkish Kurds reside], we as the Turkish General Staff, are ready to undersign such a plan with our eyes closed.

Because we are 100 percent sure that their plan will turn out to be exactly like the one we have in place right now.⁴⁴

When PKK danger to the country's territorial integrity had practically been removed, attention was drawn to the terror acts of the Muslim and ultra-nationalist radicals, the Turkish Hizbullah. The secular integrity of the country was now at risk. The victims of this ugly war – disappearances, the extra-judicial killings, the remains of more than forty mutilated people slaughtered by the Muslim extremists – had been Kurds from the southeastern provinces of the country, as well as Turkish intellectuals and businessmen. The fact that hundreds of Kurds – many identifying themselves with the PKK – were among the victims, raised the suspicion that Turkish Hizbullah had actually acted as an arm of the Turkish military. The PKK–Hizbullah animosity was actually a civil war within a civil war; although the PKK had a declared Marxist ideology, it also used Muslim ideas to attract the conservative Kurdish Muslims of southeastern Turkey. The Kurds, most of them Sunni Muslims, tend to be more pious than the rest of society. Both organizations thus competed over the same people. However, another interpretation attributed this Kurdish–Muslim conflict to a struggle over the control of contraband smuggling.⁴⁵

The capture of Abdullah Ocalan in February 1999 marked a turning point, as the Republic of Turkey, established in 1923, was winning its seventeenth war (or twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth – see p. 37) against the Kurds. A year later, in February 2000, the PKK declared a unilateral, no preconditions, cease-fire. New challenges now face Turkey, in particular in the southeast of the country. The area suffers from a lack of 80,000 jobs, in particular for the pro-government paramilitary troops, the Village Guards. The end of the war with the PKK resulted in the dissolution of the force, i.e. a sharp increase of unemployment in the area. The guards were trying to resume civilian life despite the killing of animal husbandry and other means of employment, but with meager or no support at all from Ankara. This was seen as gross ingratitude because, during the war the Turkish military was helped by 95,000 guards who became the army's first line of defence. (Established in the late 1980s, the Village Guards comprised local villagers who volunteered to serve, mainly for economic reasons, or were forced to do so. Their monthly wages amounted to 115 dollars, a considerable amount in the poverty-stricken southeast.)⁴⁶

The end of the war has caused Turkey intricacies and difficulties perhaps no less intractable than during the war. Metehan Demir of the *Turkish Daily News*, who toured southeastern Turkey in late November 1997, conveyed the gist of this new situation. Leaving the area to the Turkish military alone is a sure recipe for new problems. If the Turkish state will not deal with it, the mosquitoes will return to the swamp:

The Turkish Armed Forces had managed to kill the mosquitoes (terrorists) but the swamp (terrorism) was still there. The military Generals say that the most important

thing is to drain this swamp by earning the support of the public in the region. The Generals based in the region, and the messages sent by the military from Ankara, are urging the government to take immediate economic and social measures as a follow-up to the victory won by the military against the separatist PKK . . . before it is too late. Nowadays, unfortunately, the military is everything in the southeast. It is the post office, doctor, teacher and highway constructor, as well as encouraging people to engage in new business sectors. As a General said: "Now the military is asking the state, 'Where are you?' and is urging it to come to the southeast. But holding Cabinet meetings in the southeast for show is not enough. I'm asking how many government programs have been put into effect."

Putting aside the military and national interests of the PKK, southeast Turkey contains enough social and economic reasons for the re-emergence of radicalism. An average family has 15 children – an "alarming proportion" of the young population need schooling and other facilities which are not available. Also women are regarded as second class citizens, despite attempts by officers' wives to win the confidence and cooperation of these women.⁴⁷

Interestingly, the southeast suffers from the highest rate of suicide attempts among women in Turkey – twice as high as other regions. (More women than men in Turkey attempt suicide – twice as many.) Half of the region's women are illiterate – most families refuse to let the girls attend schools.⁴⁸ Perhaps there could not have been a better summation for our Turkish-Kurdish chapter: so much has to be done internally in Turkey, for the underprivileged in particular.

Notes

- 1 *The Economist*, "Survey Turkey," 8 June 1996.
- 2 *TDN*, 27 July 1999.
- 3 Tozun Bahcheli, "Turkish Foreign Policy toward Greece," in Alan Makovsky and Sabri Sayari (eds), *Turkey's New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy*, Washington, DC, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000, p. 146. Formed after the September 1980 military coup, the Council is a ten-person advisory body, chaired by the President of the country and consists of five top military officers and five senior civilian leaders, including the Prime Minister and the secretaries for defense and foreign affairs.
- 4 Philip Robins, "Turkey: The Kurdish Factor. The Overlord State: Turkish Policy and the Kurdish Issue," *International Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 4, October 1993, p. 666.
- 5 *Time*, 15 April 1991; P. Lyman (Director, Bureau for Refugee Programs, US State Dept.), "The Iraqi Refugees Problem," presentation before the US Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs, Washington, DC, 20 May 1991; *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations*, Annual 6, 1991, pp. 257–259; Zvi Bareil, *Ha'aretz*, 15 July 1994; Yoav Karni, *Ha'aretz Supplement*, 9 August 1991.
- 6 *TDN*, 7 October 1993; *Time*, 6 December 1993; *Ha'aretz*, 17 December 1993; *Kathimerini* (Greek), 14 December 1998; Ismet G. Imset, *The PKK: A Report on Separatist Violence in Turkey (1973–1992)*, Ankara, Turkish Daily News Publications, 1992, p. 140.
- 7 *Time*, 6 December 1993; Robins, "Turkey: The Kurdish Factor," pp. 662–663.
- 8 *TDN*, 7 October 1993; *Time*, 6 December 1993; *Ha'aretz*, 17 December 1993.
- 9 Henry J. Barkey, "The Struggle of a 'Strong' State," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 1, Autumn 2000, pp. 87–105, 97.

- 10 TDN, 7 October 1993; 31 May 1999; *Time*, 6 December 1993; Hila Shlomberger *Ha'aretz* (reprinted from *Die Zeit*), 8 March 1991; Abdullah Ocalan, interview, Kurdish satellite MED-TV, London, 13 December 1998, quoted in *Ha'aretz*, 15 December 1998.
- 11 *The Economist*, reprinted in *Ha'aretz*, 9 June 1999; Tamar Gabelnick, William D. Hartung and Jennifer Washburn, *Arming Repression: U.S. Arms Sales to Turkey During the Clinton Administration*, a joint report of the World Policy Institute and the Federation of American Scientists, October 1999, available at www.fas.org/asmp/library/reports/turkeyrep.htm
- 12 Robins, "Turkey: The Kurdish Factor," pp. 658–667.
- 13 *The Economist*, 31 October 1992; *Time*, 15 April 1991; 28 June 1993; *Ha'aretz*, 1 February 1994.
- 14 *Ha'aretz* (reprinted from *Wall Street Journal*), 19 April 1993; Thomas Friedman, *Ha'aretz* (reprinted from *New York Times*), 23 May 1995; William Safire, *New York Times*, 30 March 1995.
- 15 *The Economist*, 31 October 1992.
- 16 Guneri Civagolu, *Milliyet* (Turkish), 3 December 1998.
- 17 Dani Rubenstein, *Ha'aretz*, 3 February 1991; Yoav Karni, *Ha'aretz Supplement*, 9, 16 August 1991. On the conflict between the KDP and the PUK see *Time*, 27 March 1995; William Safire, *New York Times*, 30 March 1995; Orya Shavit, *Ha'aretz*, 2 October 1998; TDN, 31 May 1999.
- 18 Alan Makovsky, "Kurdish Agreement Signals New U.S. Commitment," *Policywatch*, No. 341, 29 September 1998.
- 19 Metin Heper, "The Ottoman Legacy and Turkish Politics," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 1, Autumn 2000, pp. 63–82, 76.
- 20 *The Economist*, "Survey Turkey," 8 June 1996; Robins, "Turkey: The Kurdish Factor," pp. 661–664; TDN, 7 October 1993; *Ha'aretz*, 31 August 1993; Yoav Karni, *Ha'aretz Supplement*, 16 August 1991; Servet Mutlu, "Ethnic Kurds in Turkey: A Demographic Study," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4, November 1996, p. 538, n. 64; TDN, 16 April 1999; TDN, quoting President Demirel, 12 July 1999; *Turkish Probe*, 30 November 1997; 21 February 1999.
- 21 Dogu Ergil, "The Kurdish Question after Ocalan," TDN, 27 February 1999.
- 22 TDN, 27 April 1999.
- 23 Ergil, "The Kurdish Question after Ocalan."
- 24 Metehan Demir, *Turkish Probe*, 30 November 1997.
- 25 Author's interview with air force officers, Ankara, February 1999.
- 26 Andrew Purvis, "Firsthand Experience," *Time*, 29 October 2001.
- 27 Ergil, "The Kurdish Question after Ocalan."
- 28 M. Necati Ozfatura, *Turkiye* (Turkish), 13 January 1999.
- 29 President Ozal's television speech concerning Turkish help to Iraqi refugees, 31 May 1991, *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations, Special Issue on Turkey and the Gulf Crisis*, Annual 6, 1991, pp. 209–211; *Ha'aretz*, 28 March 1991; *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 April 1998; TDN, 22 February 1999; 27 February 1999; 9 March 1999; Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the MHP, TDN, 23 April 1999; Stephen Kinzer, *New York Times*, reprinted in *Ha'aretz*, 9 June 1999.
- 30 Mesut Yegen, "The Turkish State Discourse and the Exclusion of Kurdish Identity," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, April 1996 pp. 216, 217, 227, n. 1. Special Issue: Turkey – Identity, Democracy, Politics.
- 31 For a thorough demographic study of the Kurds in Turkey, see Mutlu, "Ethnic Kurds in Turkey: A Demographic Study," pp. 517–541; *The Economist*, "Survey Turkey," 8 June 1996.
- 32 Hikmet Ulugbay, "Sevres," TDN, 31 May 1995.
- 33 Ismail Soysal, "Seventy Years of Turkish-Arab Relations and an Analysis of Turkish-Iraqi Relations (1920–1990)," *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations*, Annual 6, 1991, p. 76;

- President Ozal television speech, 31 May 1991, p. 210; *Ha'aretz*, 28 March 1991; Yoav Karni, *Ha'aretz Supplement*, 16 August 1991.
- 34 Quoted in Athens News Agency, *Daily News Bulletin*, 7 March 1996; *The Economist*, "Survey Turkey," 8 June 1996.
- 35 "Turkish Parliamentary Migration Commission, Migration Report," *Turkish Probe*, 7 June 1998; *Turkish Probe*, 21 February 1999. According to the US State Department Annual Human Rights report (released in February 1999), 560,000 villagers were forcibly evacuated after the conflict began.
- 36 Editorial, *TDN*, 7 October 1993; *Time*, 6 December 1993; Robins, "Turkey: The Kurdish Factor," pp. 662, 666; *Ha'aretz* (reprinted from *Der Spiegel*), 27 January 1995; *Ha'aretz* (reprinted from *New York Times*), 9 March 1995; *Ha'aretz* (reprinted from *New York Times*), 14 March 1995.
- 37 *Milliyet*, 23 January 1998; *Sabah* (Turkish), 23 January 1998.
- 38 Quoted in Gabelnick, Hartung and Washburn, *Arming Repression*. See also Fehmi Koru, "What If We Change Ourselves?," *TDN*, 30 June 1999.
- 39 *The Economist*, "Survey Turkey," 8 June 1996; *Time*, 7 April 1997; *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 April 1998; *Milliyet*, 23 January 1998; US State Department, 1998 Annual Human Rights Report, quoted in *TDN*, 1 March 1999; *TDN*, 4 May 1999; *TDN*, 6 May 1999; *TDN*, 30 June 1999.
- 40 Kemal Kirisci, "Turkey and the Kurdish 'Safe Haven' in Northern Iraq," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Spring 1996, p. 4. On the "two and a half wars" see also COSMOS, published by Panteion University, Athens, Institute of International Relations, Vol. 2, No. 9, September–October 1998.
- 41 *Hurriyet*, 14 January 1998.
- 42 COSMOS, January–February 1998; *TDN*, 23 February 1999.
- 43 Author's interview with Foreign Ministry officials, February 1999.
- 44 General Cevik Bir, Deputy Chief of Staff, Turkish Armed Forces, *Turkish Probe*, 30 November 1997. See also *Ha'aretz*, 9 January 1998.
- 45 Stephen Kinzer, *New York Times*, reprinted in *Ha'aretz*, 24 January 2000; Henri J. Barkey, "The Struggles of a 'Strong' State," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 1, Autumn 2000, pp. 87–105, 102–103.
- 46 *Ibid.*; Stephen Kinzer, *New York Times*, reprinted in *Ha'aretz*, 17 May 2000.
- 47 *TDN*, 30 November 1997.
- 48 *New York Times*, 3 November 2000.