



**LUND UNIVERSITY**

Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology

Lund University

Centre of Language and Literature

Department of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies

ARAK 11, Middle Eastern Studies

Bachelor Thesis, VT 2013

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# **Securitising Kurdistan**

**How the Kurdish question has affected, and been affected by,  
Turkey's security policies 1984-2005**

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To the Kurds in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran and elsewhere. May the day come when you are no longer defined as a “question” or a “problem”, but merely as a people.

## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how the Kurdish question in Turkey has affected the country's security policies during the time between 1984 and 2005. To do this, several different factors are analysed, such as the securitisation of the Kurdish question, the (non)involvement of the civil society, and several state institutions. These institutions are the armed forces (TSK), the National Intelligence Organisation (MIT), and the National Security Council (MGK). These specific institutions are chosen because they are crucial in the securitisation and handling of the Kurdish question in Turkey. Furthermore, Turkey's foreign policies will also be analysed insofar it has been affected by the Kurdish presence in Turkey and its neighbouring countries.

This thesis will seek to show that the Kurdish question have indeed affected Turkish policies and the Turkish society on virtually all levels. The securitisation of the issue has meant that the military has gained a notoriously strong position in the society; it has brought with it a negative spiral, where the securitisation have led to increased violence, which in turn have justified both the initial and further securitisation. The securitisation have also meant that the use of extreme measures, such as murder, torture and kidnappings, have been normalised not only among the military personnel, but the wider Turkish civil population as well. The thesis argues that the Kurdish question, and indeed Turkey as a whole, would have been better served had it not been a securitised issue.

Keywords: Turkey, Kurdistan, PKK, security, AKP, securitization, Kurdish nationalism.

## Abbreviations

AKP	<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i>	Justice and Development Party
AP	<i>Adalet Partisi</i>	Justice Party
CHP	<i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i>	Republican People's Party
CSO		Civil Society Organisation
EU		European Union
HPG	<i>Hêzên Parastina Gel</i>	People's Defence Force
MGK	<i>Milli Güvenlik Kurulu</i>	National Security Council
MGSB	<i>Milli Güvenlik Siyaset Bölgüsü</i>	National Security Policy Paper
MIT	<i>Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı</i>	National Intelligence Organisation
NATO		North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO		Non-Governmental Organisation
OIC		Organisation of Islamic Countries
PJAK	<i>Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê</i>	Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (Iran)
PKK	<i>Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan</i>	Kurdistan Worker's Party
PYD	<i>Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat</i>	Democratic Union Party (Syria)
TUSAID	<i>Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği</i>	Turkish Industry and Business Association
TSK	<i>Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri</i>	Turkish Armed Forces
US/USA		United States of America
USSR		Soviet Union

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# 1 Introduction

Ever since its formation in 1923, Turkey has struggled with its concepts of “Turkishness” and nationalism. With the rise of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey, as a nation state, was created from a mosaic of ethnic and/or religious groups. These included Turks, Jews, Kurds, and others – some of which had to struggle more than others to accept their new identity.

The Kurds in particular found it hard from the very beginning to adapt to this new Turkish identity, and have struggled to be recognised as a minority with rights to practise and study their own language as well as traditions and other cultural expressions. The Turko-Kurdish relationship has at best been strained ever since. The importance of the area has not diminished over the years and Turkey’s recent involvement in the regional Middle Eastern politics and security has further sparked international attention directed towards the region.

In the light of these historical events, combined with Turkey’s desire to join the EU and important events in the region, Turkey’s security policies will be analysed, especially in regards to the Kurdish question and the PKK.

## 1.1 Purpose and research question

The aim of this study is to analyse the security situation in Turkey and its relations with neighbouring countries. Turkey has a long history of military oriented security policies, a tradition which will be assessed and analysed; the analysis will show the importance of including various other actors in the concept of security. Furthermore, the Kurdish question in the country continues to affect and influence the security decisions of Ankara, even when not directly involved. The thesis will analyse how and to what extent the Kurds, mainly located in the south-eastern parts of the country, impinge the nationwide security thinking. Another of the main components of this thesis is to analyse deeply the two main ideologies in modern Turkey (Kemalism and neo-Ottomanism), and how their respective policies have affected both the Kurds and the general security thinking in the country.

Hence, this can be summarised into several sub queries which in turn will answer the main question in this thesis. Some of these sub queries are as follows:

- *How has the public regard of the Kurdish question evolved and developed throughout the history of the Turkish republic?*

- *In what way and why has the Kurdish question affected Turkey's relations to its neighbouring countries?*
- *How has the two large ideologies in Turkish politics – Kemalism and neo-Ottomanism – handled the Kurdish question?*

To sum up, the all-encompassing question the thesis will look to answer is:

- *How, and to what extent, has the Kurdish question affected and been affected by the security policies of Turkey?*

## **1.2 Method and material**

The method employed in this thesis is a qualitative research<sup>1</sup> about how the Kurdish minority in Turkey has affected the country's security policies. This method is employed by scholars looking to assess texts and information – both primary and secondary – and to connect their research to the work of other researchers. Thus, it is a highly usable method which allows any researcher to find their desired angle of research; however, the same usability carries with it a certain risk of subjectivity. It is thus extremely important to seek to find and make use of a wide range of material, even if it does not fit the hypothesis; transparency is key. There is always a risk that the findings end to reflect the researcher's own opinions and thoughts. Nonetheless, the method usually does not lead to a stiff conclusion, but one that is dynamic and fluid.<sup>2</sup> The method allows the researcher to critically read and study certain texts to further be able to find the correlation between them, and hopefully construct a new, hitherto unknown path within the research area. Moreover, it is of extreme importance to thoroughly read and analyse the material, and not "let it speak for itself". It can be said that a qualitative method is based on several steps, which include but are not limited to, collecting, analysing and verifying material.<sup>3</sup> In this thesis, different texts will be analysed in regards to the Kurdish question and its effect on Turkey as a whole as well as on the neighbouring countries; this means that the major sources for this thesis are secondary. However, a few primary sources will be used, such as official documents issued by the military, the constitution of Turkey, and certain laws.

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<sup>1</sup> Florén, Anders, and Ågren, Henrik. 2006. *Historiska undersökningar*. Lund, Studentlitteratur AB, 2006, pp. 55-59

<sup>2</sup> Esaiasson, Peter, Giljam, Mikael, Oscarsson, Henrik, and Wägnerud, Lena. 2002. *Metodpraktikan: konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*. Stockholm, Norstedts juridik, 2002, pp. 232; 233-5; Denscombe, Martyn. 2009. *Forskningshandboken – för småskaliga forskningsprojekt inom samhällsvetenskaperna*. Lund, Studentlitteratur AB, 2009, pp. 398-401

<sup>3</sup> Denscombe, Martyn, 2009, pp. 367-8; 369

Employing a qualitative research method based mainly on secondary material can sometimes be risky; however, taking into account the fact that the majority of the resources and scholars used in this analysis are widely accepted as highly scientific, the risk can and will be minimised; the reliability of the sources are high. A number of different sources will be used, where the authors have different backgrounds and perspectives, to avoid bias in the analysis. The main sources are various books and articles by scholars within the subject, most notably Ömer Taspinar, Graham E. Fuller and Ian Lesser. Michael M. Gunter is another scholar that has been an inspiration to this thesis. The majority of the scholars used in this thesis are recognised within the field, having researched Turkey and the Middle East extensively, and published several works on the subject.

The sources used in this thesis are written in English or Swedish. This linguistic limitation is obviously a disadvantage; however, it is necessary as both the Turkish and Kurdish languages lie beyond the scope of knowledge of the author. In seeking to minimize any constraints that may stem from this issue, a wide number and variety of sources has been incorporated.

### **1.3 Theory**

When it comes to the theoretical background, its inspiration is gathered mainly from Pinar Bilgin's notable book on security, *Regional Security in the Middle East: A Critical Perspective*.<sup>4</sup> It has been used in a general way, to provide a basic understanding on terms such as security, actors, referents and others. Bilgin uses the concept of "invention of regions" in her book, a concept that has been slightly reformed here to instead encompass invention of *issues* – meaning that the Turkish state has effectively made an issue and a problem from the Kurdish presence in the country.<sup>5</sup> This notion will serve as a red thread throughout the thesis, and virtually the whole analysis is based on this assumption; the Kurdish question has become a securitised issue when it in fact did not have to. The main idea derived from Bilgin's book is thus that the Kurdish question is a securitised problem, mainly handled in military terms, but would have been better served (both for the Turkish state and the Kurds) if it had been handled by other actors in society. Thus, the theoretical framework for this thesis can be summarised in two simple charts:

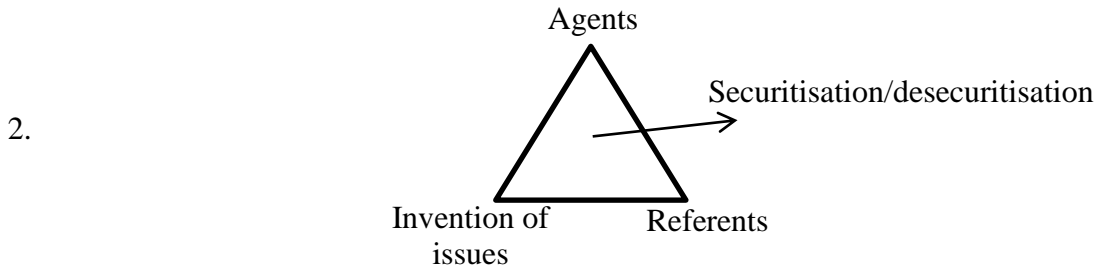
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<sup>4</sup> Bilgin, Pinar. 2005. *Regional Security in the Middle East: A Critical Perspective*. New York, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Bilgin, Pinar, 2005, p. 67



1. Agents – inventions of issues – referents → securitisation or desecuritisation



Here, the word agent is used to describe the main actor in the case analysed. Largely throughout Turkey’s history, the state and the military have been the agents and thus been responsible for upholding and enforcing the security. Traditionally, this has been the case in many countries and states due to the reason that the state is the sole legitimate user of violence.<sup>6</sup> The referent, however, is the actor being affected by the security, or lack thereof. Hence, the state can be both agent and referent; in this thesis, as argued by Bilgin and others, the concept of referent is broadened to include the civil population, organisations, individuals, and other social groups.<sup>7</sup> Invention of issues, on the other hand, refers to the process where the agent has created an issue (or a region, as in Bilgin’s study) to fit the security discourse of the agent.<sup>8</sup> When related to each other, all factors affect and are affected by each other, leading to either securitisation or desecuritisation, as can be seen in the charts on the previous page.

#### 1.4 Definitions

This thesis focuses mainly on security and security policies in Turkey, as well as the securitisation of the Kurdish question. Therefore, a few basic definitions will be provided here as a first major departure point to help the reader.

The term *the Kurdish Question* will be used consistently in this thesis; other terms will be used only limitedly and then usually only appear within quotation marks. The reasons for this is naturally that the term “problem” has a decisively negative connotation, as well as the fact that it is widely regarded as more scientifically acceptable to use the term “question”.

Moreover, when the term *the Kurds* is used, it is usually in referral to the Kurds fighting for

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<sup>6</sup> Bilgin, Pınar, 2005, p. 34-5; 38-9

<sup>7</sup> Bilgin, Pınar, 2005, p.33

<sup>8</sup> Bilgin, Pınar, 2005, p. 67; 113

(semi)autonomy and/or the Kurds with nationalistic or separatist tendencies. The word “Kurds” refers to the general ethnic group only when clearly indicated by the context. This definition and the reasoning behind it are derived from those of most of the scholars on the subject.

*Kurdistan* will, if not otherwise specified, refer to the area spanning over Iran, Syria, Iraq and Turkey that is mainly populated by Kurds. The specific areas of Kurdistan located in either of these countries will be referred to as Turkish Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, Iranian Kurdistan or Syrian Kurdistan. A point of criticism is sometimes raised about the use of the term Turkish Kurdistan, as the word “Turk” is so intimately interconnected to the concept of ethnicity. Here, no such appraisal or judgement will be put on the term – it is used simply to define the geographic area of Kurdistan located in south-eastern Anatolia.

In relation to the Kurdish question and the civil society organisations in Turkey, the definition of both *securitisation* and *desecuritisation* draws heavily on the definitions provided by authors Kaliber & Tocci<sup>9</sup>, as well as Polat<sup>10</sup>; however, their definitions are paraphrased here and any misunderstandings are the responsibility of the author of this thesis. These definitions are chosen because they suit the purpose of the thesis and give an accurate framework for the analysis.

By *securitising* something and labelling it as a security issue, the “securitisor” (in this case the Turkish state) has legitimised the use of extreme measures to handle it; measures that would otherwise not be acceptable. A “successful” securitisation means that the issue at hand (here, the Kurdish question) – the “Other” – is seen as a viable and existential threat to the major part of the referent group (the Turkish society). In doing so, the use of excessive measures are normalised among the ordinary citizens of the Turkish state and effectively also making it harder to find other solutions than military to the problem. An incompatibility between the Turkish state and the Kurdish society has been created.

*Desecuritisation* means that the feeling of the Other as an existential threat is lessened, to the point that the use of extraordinary measures are no longer normalised; it does not, however,

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<sup>9</sup> Kaliber, Alper, and Tocci, Nathalie. 2010. “Civil Society and the Transformation of Turkey's Kurdish Question.” *Dialogue* 41, no. 2: 191-215, pp. 192-3

<sup>10</sup> Polat, Rabia Karakaya. 2008. “The Kurdish Issue: Can the AK Party Escape Securitization?.” *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 3: 75-86, p. 77; Polat, Rabia Karakaya, 2008, p. 79

mean an automatic deconstruction of the perceived incompatibilities between the Turkish state and the Kurdish society. In the context of the Turkish state, the process of desecuritisation also means a broadening of politics, to open up a space for other actors than the military that have up until now been off bounds.

*Neo-Ottomanism* is one of two of the main political ideologies assessed in this thesis. It refers to a recent political movement in Turkey and is an ideology that can be said to promote shared common traits between Turks and Kurds such as religion (Sunni Islam). Neo-Ottomanism tends to be relatively forward-looking, in the sense that it draws on the historical Ottomanism to create a more inclusive future Turkey for both Turks and Kurds. It is important to remember, however, that neo-Ottomanism typically does not condone Kurdish separatism or nationalism in any sort of way; rather, they stress religion as a common denominator between the two groups and see it as a basis of a more inclusive Turkish citizenship. The ruling party in Turkey, Justice and Development Party (AKP), can be said to be adherent to this ideology; however, much remains to be done before the societal space opens up enough to fully include Kurds.

*Kemalism*, the other ideology discussed in this thesis, is far more conservative and exclusive. Drawing heavily on the ideas and thoughts of the founder of the Turkish nation, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Kemalism* focuses on nationalism and secularism – leaving no space for either Kurdish identity or the use of Islam as a common ground. The military and security establishment in Turkey sees itself as a protector of the almost sacred teachings of Atatürk, instantly making any notions of ethnicity and identity other than Turkish a no-go zone. *Kemalism* sees neo-Ottomanism as dangerously tolerant both to political Islam and the Kurdistan Worker's Party, PKK; *Kemalism* tends to view all things Kurdish as equal to the PKK and terrorism. In doing so, *Kemalism* has endorsed the securitising agenda and contributed to the normalisation of extraordinary measures such as military operations, excessive force and others.<sup>11</sup>

### **1.5 Previous research**

During the last fifteen to twenty years a rapid increase and intensity have been seen in the amount of research published within the field of Turkey and the Kurds. A vast amount of

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<sup>11</sup> The background for the definitions of *Kemalism* and *neo-Ottomanism* has been gathered primarily from the articles of Taspinar's as well as Aslan & Kayaci's (see notes 7 and 14, respectively)

scholars have paved the way for this thesis with their excellent research on many different subjects within this enormous field of study.

The article on Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism by Ömer Taspınar<sup>12</sup> is an extremely useful and interesting article. Taspınar is a recognised scholar within the field of Turkish politics, specialising in both the Middle East and Turkey. Taspınar has published several articles and two books. This particular article discusses Turkey's evolving role as a mediator and actor in the Middle East; a new policy is currently being developed where Turkey becomes more and more involved in regional politics instead of solely focusing on the West (i.e. NATO and the EU). Taspınar argues that there is a schism in the Turkish society as to which way forward is the better; the country is divided between the traditionalists, who typically confess to Kemalism, and the progressives, found in the Neo-Ottomanist parties. The article relates these two policies to the Kurdish question in the country and analyses how either of them may affect the Kurdish society, making it an excellent source for this thesis. Although published in 2008, the article is still relevant as the schism in Turkey still exists, and the future course is not yet set.

Another substantial work on the history of the Kurds is *A Modern History of the Kurds* by David McDowall.<sup>13</sup> It is one of the most well-known books on the subject in which McDowall gives a thorough and in-depth recount of the Kurds' history throughout Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria – as well as their collective history before being divided between four modern nation states. The work is slightly dated, as it was first published in 1996, even though the latest revised edition was released in 2004. It is a very heavy book, containing lots of information that might not be of explicit use to this thesis. Regardless, it is a must-read for anyone interested in the Kurdish question throughout history.

One of the more recent significant works on the Kurdish question is *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey* by Michael M. Gunter<sup>14</sup>. This book gives an extensive insight into the Kurdish question in both Turkey and Iraq, as well as a brief overview of the Kurds in Iran and Syria. Gunter is one of the most noted

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<sup>12</sup> Taspınar, Ömer. 2008. "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism." *Carnegie Papers* September 2008, no. 10.

<sup>13</sup> McDowall, David. 1996. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. London, Tauris.

<sup>14</sup> Gunter, Michael M. 2011. *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

scholars in the subject – he has written extensively on the subject during the past three decades – and the book deals with virtually all aspects of the Kurdish question. However, one could criticise Gunter for tending to accede slightly conspiracy theory influenced rhetoric, especially in the chapter dealing with Turkey’s “deep state”<sup>15</sup>.

Emrullah Uslu published an interesting article in 2007, named *Turkey’s Kurdish Problem: Steps Toward a Solution*.<sup>16</sup> The article contains a lot of suggestions on how Turkish policy makers should act in regards to the Kurdish question, and hence it is an interesting article. It focuses a lot on America’s role in the conflict and the eventual solution; Uslu might be criticised for seeming slightly biased. In his article, he sometimes tends to use normative language. Bearing this in mind, Uslu has still produced many interesting articles on Turkey, Turkish politics and the Kurdish “problem”.

For a general background on Turkey and the Middle East as a general region, William L. Cleveland’s *A History of the Modern Middle East*<sup>17</sup> is an excellent work. Cleveland has published several books and articles on the region, and *A History of the Modern Middle East* is widely regarded as one of the best on the subject.

## **1.6 Delimitations**

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse and discuss the Kurdish question in Turkey; hence, focus will be on Turkey. Other countries will only be taken in regard and discussed when it is relevant, such as in relation to how Turkey’s foreign policies have been affected by the Kurdish question. Otherwise, the situation of the Kurds in other countries will not be analysed. The same delimitation extends to policies and institutions in Turkey; they will be assessed only insofar they are relevant to the research question, and otherwise disregarded. The time frame for the main analysis will be from 1984, when PKK launched its insurgency, until 2005. The year of 2005 is chosen as the ulterior confinement because of several factors; first and foremost this was the year of the new Iraqi constitution, in which Iraqi Kurdistan was afforded semi autonomy. It was also the year Prime Minister Erdoğan famously admitted that Turkey had a Kurdish problem and that the state had made grave mistakes in trying to assess it. Furthermore, the EU initiated the formal and official membership process with Turkey, and

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<sup>15</sup> Gunter, Michael M, 2011, chapter 6, pp. 107-130

<sup>16</sup> Uslu, Emrullah. 2007. “Turkey’s Kurdish Problem: Steps Toward a Solution.” *Studies In Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 2: 157-172.

<sup>17</sup> Cleveland, William L. 2009. *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Boulder, Westview Press, 2009.

the Turkish penal code saw several important changes (the most notable being the replacement of article 312 with the new, slightly more democratic article 301). Hence, it is deemed that events occurring after this critical juncture of a year are far too essential and important to both Turkish and Kurdish development to be analysed in this thesis due to space limitations. Events after 2005 will therefore not be taken into regards, except in part 3.7 where the present and future will, very briefly, be dealt with to provide further understanding and spark interest in further research. Furthermore, important events occurring before 1984 will be briefly dealt with in the background, and are similarly presented in the analysis only where it is crucial for the discussion.

### **1.7 Disposition**

This thesis is assembled in four major parts; introduction, background, analysis and conclusion. In the background, major relevant events between the formation of the state of Turkey in 1923 until the first occurrence of PKK insurgency in 1984 will be briefly presented. Thereafter, the main analysis will follow. This chapter is divided into several subchapters, each dealing with specific elements relevant to the Kurdish question. Finally, the findings will be presented in the conclusion and the thesis will be rounded off with a bibliography. Four appendices will also be included at the very end.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 1923-1950: The early modern Turkey and the Kurds

The legacy after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish nation state, can be summarised and encompassed within a single ideology, Kemalism. Kemalism is built on two pillars – secularism and assimilationist nationalism –<sup>18</sup> and due to this fact, the modern, post-Atatürk Turkey sought to be a secular state in which all minorities could be gathered under a collective Turkishness; an identity that was formed with the new state and was to be a “common national, linguistic, and territorial identity”. However, it was an ideology that did not translate well into real life as its minority groups were recognised as Turkish citizens but were in fact discriminated against by, amongst others, being excluded from holding governmental jobs. Taking this into account, it is not surprising that this new ideology was resisted, sometimes violently, by different minority groups, in particular the Kurds and Islamists alike. Thus, the Kurdish resistance was born alongside with the new state of Turkey as a result of both the abolishment of the caliphate and the Turkish nationalism. Because of a series of Islamic uprisings by the Kurds in the early days of the Turkish state, its new leadership became deeply suspicious of both Kurdish and Islamic interests in the country. The legacy of this suspicion can be found in Turkey to this day;<sup>19</sup> the tension between the Kurds and the Turks has certainly not diminished over time. The problems the leaders of Turkey faced within their own borders deterred them from pursuing a proactive foreign policy; the challenge of maintaining control in the Kurdish areas of Turkey proved enough without the additional ordain of active and outreaching regional involvement. The little involvement it had with the wider Middle East was with its neighbours, and then with the implicit or explicit reason to curb the Kurdish resistance.<sup>20</sup>

Modern Turkey inherited certain traits from the Ottoman Empire, and took example from the fall of its predecessor. For example, it pays very close attention to its national sovereignty and keeping Turkey a unitary state – both of these concerns stem from the history of European intervention and ethnic conflict during the downfall of the Empire. It has bred an extreme

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<sup>18</sup> Aslan, Seyfettin, and Müslüm Kayacı. 2013. “Historical Background and Principles of Kemalism.” *E-Journal Of New World Sciences Academy (NWSA)* 8, no. 1: 16-32, pp. 23; 25-8

<sup>19</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, pp. 4-6; Kendal. 1993. “Kurdistan in Turkey.” *A People Without a Country / Edited by Gerard Chaliand*. London, Zed Press. 1993: 38-94, pp. 52-3; Gunter, Michael M, 2011, p. 4

<sup>20</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, p. 6

suspiciousness when it comes to any foreign intentions to the Turkish territory, and it has severely affected the relations between Turkey and its neighbours.<sup>21</sup>

Because of Turkey's desire to be a complete and unitary nation-state, the Kurdish presence in the country was never accepted or recognised. Several non-Muslim minorities were recognised in the Treaty of Lausanne and safeguards their existence in the newly formed state; however, the Kurds were excluded and could thus not expect any protection whatsoever.<sup>22</sup> In response to this neglect, there have been several Kurdish uprisings since the creation of Turkey, the first being the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925 when the ultimate goal was an independent Kurdistan. The rebellion was severely repressed, leaving hundreds of villages burned and thousands dead; this was probably one of the first occurrences in which foreign powers were accused of conspiring to bring about the downfall of Turkey.<sup>23</sup> Within three years, nearly a million Kurds were displaced in response to the rebellions, resulting in yet another uprising in the beginning of the 1930's which too was beaten down in the harshest way possible. There were even laws created to facilitate the wrong-doings of the Turkish public during the uprising, and the repression continued for months after the actual uprising had been beaten down; these laws gave immunity to anybody conducting what would otherwise have been considered crimes during the period stretching from June 20, 1930 to December 10 of the same year.<sup>24</sup> The great uprising of Dersim between 1936 and -38 followed and was promptly repressed by the state in the same brutal way as the earlier rebellions.<sup>25</sup> It can even be said that the government went further still in its attempts to break the uprising, and did not hesitate to use chemical weapons and burn trapped people alive. The people in the region were portrayed as barbaric and backwards, without any explanations whatsoever as to what actually caused this backwardness.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lesser, Ian. 2010. "The Evolution of Turkish National Security Strategy." *Turkey's engagement with modernity: Conflict and change in the twentieth century / Edited by Celia J. Kerslake, Kerem A-Ktem, Philip Robins*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010: 258-276, p. 260

<sup>22</sup> Treaty of Lausanne, retrieved from [[http://sam.baskent.edu.tr/belge/Lausanne\\_ENG.pdf](http://sam.baskent.edu.tr/belge/Lausanne_ENG.pdf)] accessed: 2013-04-24, articles 38, 39, 40 (also articles 37-45, part I, section III "protection of minorities")

<sup>23</sup> Kendal, 1993, pp. 52-3; Gunter, Michael M, 2011, p. 4

<sup>24</sup> Kendal, 1993, pp. 54-6; Gunter, Michael M, 2011, pp. 4-5; Act No. 1850 regarding the Kurdish uprisings of 1930, retrieved from

[[http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR\\_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc010/kanuntbmmc010/kanuntbmmc01001850.pdf](http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc010/kanuntbmmc010/kanuntbmmc01001850.pdf)] accessed: 2013-05-09, see appendix 3; McDowall, David, 1996, pp. 395

<sup>25</sup> Gunter, Michael M, 2011, p. 5

<sup>26</sup> Kendal, 1993, pp. 58-61



## **2.2 1950-1983: Liberal politics, military coups and social change**

In the years following the Dersim genocide/ethnocide,<sup>27</sup> there was a quieter period during which not much happened; neither Kurdish uprisings nor aggressions from the state increased. A break in the “witch hunt” on the Kurds came in the 1950’s, when the Democrat Party won elections. Even though the Democrat Party were in power for a mere ten year period before being ousted by the military, it marked the beginning of an era where neither Kurdish rebels nor Islamists were seen as the main threat to Turkish stability; communism was. During roughly 40 years, identity as a common denominator found itself inferior as people instead came together under ideology – the Kurds often aligned with the leftists and socialists, while Islamists instead sided with the conservatives. The military during this period was still a force to be reckoned with, as it intervened in politics three times (1960, 1971, and 1980) when it deemed tendencies against nationalism, secularism and/or statism became too loud. This ideology over identity period came to an end with the emergence of the 1980’s, and thus problems related to Islam and Kurdish nationalism appeared on the Turkish security agenda once again.<sup>28</sup> The main concern when dealing with political Islam, seems to have been Islamic terrorism from the margins of the Turkish society rather than a general drift away from secularism. It rose to be one of the most pressing issues for Turkey’s security and intelligence forces; the security establishment was especially worried that Islamists and Kurds might join forces to “terrorise” the country (regardless of the fact that it thus far hasn’t happened).<sup>29</sup>

1961 saw the emergence of a new constitution, instigated by the military which carried out a military coup the year before. The new constitution actually did stipulate a somewhat more democratic environment in Turkey, even though it was often outright disregarded. As a result, several new political parties, organisations and magazines sprung up with varying success; those deemed too outspoken or too radical were quickly shut down. The constitution clearly protected freedom of speech and press, but was more often than not ignored when chasing down and prosecuting activists who uttered even the mildest suggestion for increased democratisation and participation in southeast Anatolia.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Fernandes, Desmond. 2012. “Modernity and the linguistic genocide of Kurds in Turkey.” *International Journal Of The Sociology Of Language* 2012, no. 217: 75-98, p. 87

<sup>28</sup> Cleveland, William L, 2009, pp. 278-9; Kendal, 1993, pp. 68-71; Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, pp. 7-9; McDowall, David, 1996, p. 397

<sup>29</sup> Lesser, Ian, 2010, p. 263

<sup>30</sup> Kendal, 1993, pp. 66-7

During the decade of 1960, first the Republican People's Party (CHP, the party formed by Atatürk) and then the newly formed Justice Party (AP) were in power. However, neither party were successful in containing the challenges rising inside the country, leaving the military unhappy once again. Another coup was carried out in 1971, and the armed forces held on to power for two years. However, it only took seven years before the third military coup in a mere 20 years occurred; this time, the military used its influence once again to change the constitution. The result was the constitution of 1982, which is still in place today<sup>31</sup> (which severely discriminates Kurds without mentioning them; as will be discussed later, all cultural and linguistic expressions outside the Turkish norm were rendered unconstitutional<sup>32</sup>). These military coups – whether consider righteous or not – all took place because of the internal climate in Turkey at the time; the political system had been created to facilitate the CHP and not a multitude of parties. Moreover, the country saw a great economic turmoil as well as a growing marginalisation of those who did not benefit from Ankara's current policies – policies that were overthrown together with the governments. The reality during these years was that the group marginalised one day might well be the benefitted group the day after, and neither of the political parties was able to stabilise the country. These years, both the politicians and the broad public had more pressing concerns than the Kurdish question – something that quickly changed at the dawn of the PKK insurgency in the summer of 1984.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cleveland, William L, 2009, pp. 281-2

<sup>32</sup> Gunter, Michael M, 2011, p. 5

<sup>33</sup> Cleveland, William L, 2009, pp. 283-5

## 3 Analysis

### 3.1 Turkey and security

Turkey as a state has been extremely conscious of its security ever since its formation in 1923. Throughout history, the notion of security has been the most important one in both political and societal development; most other considerations have been forced to an inferior position.<sup>34</sup> Turkey's approach to national security is and has been extremely NATO-focused, something that becomes blatantly obvious when looking at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website, in which Turkey's security is equalised with the collaboration of Turkey and NATO.<sup>35</sup>

While Turkey has been extremely military-focused in its security policies in the past, and the role that the military has played since the birth of the country is partly the reason why security is still so extremely important, it is by no means the sole influence; other factors are now beginning to demand their share.<sup>36</sup> These include the private sector and various ethnic groups hoping to alter their status in the country.<sup>37</sup> National security has been defined as "ensuring the survival of the population; protecting territorial integrity and preserving the basic identity of a nation, as shaped by political, economic, social and cultural traits"<sup>38</sup>, but these recent developments have also brought a change to what security actually mean. Increasingly, traditionally "soft" security aspects such as human- and economic security are now being included in the national security discourse.<sup>39</sup>

Because of its geopolitical position – strategically located between Europe, Asia, Caucasia and Africa – as well as its westernised political involvement, its importance stretches far beyond what would otherwise be expected by a medium power. Anatolia is one of the most important territories in the world, and is traditionally a very sought after location. Despite this

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<sup>34</sup> Aydin, Mustafa. 2003. "Securitization of History and Geography: Understanding of Security in Turkey." *Journal Of Southeast European & Black Sea Studies* 3, no. 2: 163-184, p. 164

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Foreign affairs, retrieved from [<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sub.en.mfa?a9753db5-9551-4e44-bd8a-1e30fe385f8c>] accessed: 2013-05-10

<sup>36</sup> Aydin, Mustafa, 2003, p. 164; Lesser, Ian, 2010, p. 258

<sup>37</sup> Lesser, Ian, 2010, p. 258

<sup>38</sup> Turkey's Perspectives and Policies on Security Issues, retrieved from [[http://www.mfa.gov.tr/i\\_-turkey\\_s-security-perspective\\_-historical-and-conceptual-background\\_-turkey\\_s-contributions.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/i_-turkey_s-security-perspective_-historical-and-conceptual-background_-turkey_s-contributions.en.mfa)] accessed 2013-05-09

<sup>39</sup> Lesser, Ian, 2010, p. 258

– or, perhaps, because of this – Turkey has a deep insecurity complex. In 2001, former Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz aptly named this Turkey’s “national security syndrome”. It can be argued that it is not in fact clear what Yılmaz meant by his statement, but it seems likely that what he meant was the traditional resistance from both the TSK and the Turkish elite class to any and all development when it came to democratisation and openness regarding the Kurdish (and Cyprian) issue. It is also not far-fetched to believe that this resistance extended to the issue of discussing the military’s budget and/or decreasing the number of active soldiers. This has ultimately led to a highly securitised society as well as a general sense of insecurity among Turkey’s residents.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the feeling of isolation and thus the exaggerated focus on national security largely stems from what is commonly called *Sèvresphobia* – the feeling that Turkey is exposed to a threat from the West, a threat that was externalised in the near-division of Turkey after World War I. In the treaty of Sèvres, the possibility of establishing an independent Kurdish state was also outlined, further adding to the indignation of Turkey.<sup>41</sup> The fact that Turkey lies on such a strategic location increasingly adds to the general sense of insecurity; not only is it a natural path for migrants from east to west, but it is also sensitive to military threats from both west and east.<sup>42</sup> Caucasus and Central Asia is seen as “a breeding ground on Turkey’s border for potential risks and threats for regional security due to deep tensions between mixed national groups, contested borders, economic difficulties and competition of outsiders for influence”.<sup>43</sup>

### **3.2 Kemalism and neo-Ottomanism: two perspectives on the Kurdish question**

Turkey’s national cohesiveness is not a simple equation; its different identities – Muslim, secular, and nationalist – are quite deeply divided. There is a major tension in the country between its two largest ideologies – Kemalism and neo-Ottomanism – at the moment. The two ideologies are each other’s antagonists in almost all policy issues, and perhaps most of all in relation to the Kurdish issue. Where Kemalism sees the Kurds as a real and tangible threat to the “national and territorial integrity of the Turkish republic” and has gone as far as deeming Kurdish cultural and language rights as an expression of that threat,<sup>44</sup> neo-Ottomanism takes a more relaxed stance. It focuses much less on the perceived threat of the Kurdish community, partly due to its more confident instincts, and they are in favour of

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<sup>40</sup> Aydin, Mustafa, 2003, pp. 163; 170

<sup>41</sup> Polat, Rabia Karakaya, 2008, pp. 77-8

<sup>42</sup> 2012. "Political Overview." *Turkey Defence & Security Report* no. 1: 68-86, p. 77; Aydin, Mustafa, 2003, p. 170

<sup>43</sup> Aydin, Mustafa, 2003, p. 176

<sup>44</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, p. 2

Kurdish rights. Neo-Ottomanists work to make the policy makers of the country “more audacious, imaginative, and proactive” when it comes to the Kurds; however, the Kemalists do not see this as favourable. Quite in the opposite, they perceive “it as unrealistic, adventurist, and pro-Islamic” – partly because neo-Ottomanism is open about their willingness to allow Islam to be the red thread that binds Turks and Kurds together. Hence, Kemalism is cautious, insecure and reactive instead, something that can be reflected in Turkey’s foreign policy.<sup>45</sup>

This schism has a lot to do with the identity problem the country inherited from its Ottoman past; the country’s elite are west-oriented and consider Turkey as a part of Europe despite the fact that the vast majority of its area is located in Asia. The country is also a distinct secular state, again despite the fact that a clear majority of its population is Muslim. The process of westernisation has had a large impact on Turkey’s security policies generally, and the identity problem specifically.<sup>46</sup> However, the Kurdish question has effectively led to an interesting shift in the foreign policy stance of the two ideologies; the traditionally very pro-Western Kemalism is now turning more and more towards anti-Americanism whereas the more religious and “former Islamists” have taken up the fight for good relations with the EU and the US. This seems to have one reason only; the West is a strong supporter for Kurdish minority rights in Turkey.<sup>47</sup>

It can be argued that Kemalism is a very conservative ideology; it seeks to maintain rather than to develop and advance due to its fear of Kurdish nationalism and political Islam. Furthermore, for the Kemalists (as well as any other traditionalist), the very idea of expressing the Kurdish identity in public is viewed as a real and tangible threat to the Turkish national and territorial integrity. This results in a military-focused mind-set that undoubtedly leads to an autocratic rather than democratic society.<sup>48</sup>

### **3.3 The Kurdish Question**

While Turkey has been quick to accept Kurds as Turks, it had major issues in accepting an independent Kurdish identity, and thus they have never been afforded minority rights.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, p. 3

<sup>46</sup> Aydın, Mustafa, 2003, p. 170

<sup>47</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, p. 4

<sup>48</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, pp. 16-7

<sup>49</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, p. xi

Some, both officials and private persons, go so far as to claim the Kurds do not exist at all.<sup>50</sup> Since the nation of Turkey draws on a very explicit claim that all its inhabitants are to be considered as “Turks” and nothing else,<sup>51</sup> naturally this bred a conflict with the Kurds ever since the formation of the state; the Kurds have had a specific ethnicity and identity since approximately two thousand years ago so it is hardly surprising that they have had a very hard time adopting to this relatively new “Turkishness”. Thus, the Kurds are continuously fighting for legal and cultural rights in Turkey<sup>52</sup> and the Kurdish issue has been at the top of the agenda for all governments in Turkey, both in regards to the domestic and the international scene.<sup>53</sup>

Ever since the beginning, Turkey has built its nation from the centre, leaving the remaining areas behind, and the southeast especially so. The Kurds not only suffer from exclusion based on their very identity, they too suffer from economic backwardness due to governments who do not prioritise to build up the entire nation.<sup>54</sup> To make matters worse, Kurds were also forcibly or voluntarily (in search of better life conditions) exiled to other parts of Turkey so that they would no longer have the strength in numbers, making it easier to severely repress all expressions of Kurdishness.<sup>55</sup> Even language rights were stripped from them, making life even harder for many families living in rural locations in the southeast of the country; they speak no other language than Kurdish and have no or little hope of gaining education or jobs.<sup>56</sup>

In 1960, the regime (a military regime, after a coup) took it to yet another level and started renaming Kurdish villages. Moreover, “the army would not hesitate to bombard towns and villages’ in the event of unrest”<sup>57</sup>, as coup leader Cemal Gürsel put it. It can be argued that these policies in combination with the state-sanctioned (through “state-appointed civil servants”) harassment of the Kurdish people contributed to the eventual formation and appeal

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<sup>50</sup> Karakoç, Jülide, 2010, p. 928; Kaliber & Tocci, 2010, p. 198-9

<sup>51</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, retrieved from [[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---ilo\\_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms\\_127495.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_127495.pdf)] accessed: 2013-04-14, article 66

<sup>52</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, p. 1; Gray, David H., and Schneider, Karl K. 2010. “Regional and International Security Implications of the Current Tensions between Turkey and the Kurds.” *Research Journal Of International Studies* no. 14: 30-36, p. 30

<sup>53</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, p. 17

<sup>54</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, pp. 11; 14

<sup>55</sup> Dixon, Jeffrey C., and Murat Ergin. 2010. “Explaining Anti-Kurdish Beliefs in Turkey: Group Competition, Identity, and Globalization.” *Social Science Quarterly (Blackwell Publishing Limited)* 91, no. 5: 1329-1348, pp. 1332-3; Polat, Rabia Karakaya, 2008, p. 77; Barkey & Fuller, 1998, p. 12

<sup>56</sup> Kaliber & Tocci, 2010, p. 195

<sup>57</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, pp. 14-5

of the PKK as it served to increase the people's feeling of hopelessness. Regardless of the reason of the formation of the PKK, all things Kurdish have historically been treated as equal to the organisation – and thus equal to terrorism. This is naturally deeply problematic for both the Kurds and the country as a whole.<sup>58</sup>

Taspinar argues that the Kurdish challenge is defined by the norms of Turkey, which stems from the Kemalist tradition. Seen from this view, all Kurdish nationalism is a threat to Turkey's security and integrity. He makes the argument that the challenge for Turkey in regards to the Kurdish question and other Middle Eastern issues is to successfully balance the Kemalist tradition with the neo-Ottomanist ideas spreading in the country. Thus, it is likely that the Kurdish question will remain one of the most central issues in regards to how Turkey chooses to formulate its security policies<sup>59</sup>.

The Kurdish question did not diminish by time, but continued to escalate; especially so with the onset of the 1991 Gulf War<sup>60</sup> and the untimely 1993 death of President Özal – an unconventional politician with strong neo-Ottomanist tendencies, who believed in cooperation instead of confrontation. In fact, his death is now being investigated as murder, with the suspected reason being his openness towards the Kurds.<sup>61</sup> After his death, the country quickly returned to a state of conflict where both the Kurds and Islamists were seen as the antagonists. Once again, Turkey returned to authoritarian methods of “crush[ing] dissent and reject[ing] compromise”, resulting in a ten year period of unbroken internal war, polarisation between different groups in society, corruption and other economic bedlam before the country stabilised in 2000 when the military had effectively pushed back the resistance from both Kurds and Islamists.<sup>62</sup>

### **3.4 State institutions**

When it comes to the Kurdish question, several different state institutions stand at the fore front. These are the military, the National Security Council, the Village Guards, and others. There is a clear division between the hard-liners (Kemalists) and the liberals (neo-

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<sup>58</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, p. xii

<sup>59</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, p. 1

<sup>60</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, p. 16

<sup>61</sup> Cevik, Inur. 2013. *Turkish Prosecutor Implicates Military in Ozal's Murder*, retrieved from [<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/04/ozal-turkey-president-military-murder-revelation.html>] accessed: 2013-05-05

<sup>62</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, p. 10-2

Ottomanists) in Turkish politics; where the hard-liners argue that all concessions are detrimental, liberals tend to think that Turkish policies need to be reviewed and reformed in order to come to terms with the Kurdish question.<sup>63</sup> This too applies to the use of state apparatuses in handling the question, and it is more likely the neo-Ottomanists and other liberals will argue for an increased space for the civil society in southeast Turkey and the decrease of military solutions when it comes to the Kurds.

The security forces in Turkey have traditionally had a very important role in all aspects of society; the very birth of the country was secured by the armed forces under Atatürk. The legacy of the revered leader has successfully been guarded and taken care of by the military and the general public's respect for the authorities have both worked to maintain the superior position of the armed forces. It has taken the responsibility for "liberating, building and modernizing the nation" as well as being the guardians of the Republic as it was created by Atatürk.<sup>64</sup> It has declined little by little in the last years, and the space previously occupied by military personnel is now taken by civilians; however, these civilians all argue for the importance of continuing the stronghold of the army. It can be said that the influence of the military grows when the civil society is "weak" and vice versa. The army considers its responsibility to be "to protect the political and territorial integrity of the state as well as its secular character not only against external threats but also against its internal enemies". It is interesting to note that the armed forces draws at least part of its strength from the National Security Council (MGK) which in turn leans heavily on the National Security Policy Paper (MGSB). Apparently the exact contents of this document are kept secret from both the public and the parliament. However, a few things are known about it; for example, it identifies the two main internal threats to Turkey as militant Islam, which is seen as threat to the secular state, and the Kurdish presence, threatening the territorial integrity.<sup>65</sup>

Similar to the MGSB, the *White Book 2000* (published by the Turkish Ministry of Defence) lists the following as the most pressing threats to the country: regional conflicts, ethnic conflicts, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, religious fanaticism and terrorism.<sup>66</sup> In the paper, it is also noted that civilian politicians cannot be trusted with issues regarding

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<sup>63</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, p. 136

<sup>64</sup> Polat, Rabia Karakaya, 2008, p. 77

<sup>65</sup> Aydin, Mustafa, 2003, pp. 173-4; Polat, Rabia Karakaya, 2008, p. 77; Gunter, Michael M, 2011 pp. 110-2

<sup>66</sup> Turkey's White Book 2000, retrieved from [[http://merln.ndu.edu/whitepapers/Turkey\\_English2000.pdf](http://merln.ndu.edu/whitepapers/Turkey_English2000.pdf)] accessed: 2013-04-19, p. 2



the national security. Notably, the defence budget and procurement policies are put out of reach from political interference, although Aydin argues that it has more to do with the lack of interest from the general public than a genuine interest in keeping it safeguarded. The fact that nearly 80 per cent of the Turkish public trusts the armed forces is a clear pointer that the aforementioned statement may well be true. While the army sees itself as the protector of the values established by Atatürk, an interesting dilemma occurs: “While it intervened occasionally ‘to counter the forces blocking [the country’s] transformation and to preserve democracy, secularism, and national unity’ in order to fully modernize (i.e. westernize, Europeanize) the country and the society [...], it increasingly realizes that political intervention by the military, even with the goals of keeping unitary, secular, democratic and pro-western Turkey intact, runs counter to those ideals they purport to adhere to”.<sup>67</sup>

The most important of these has been the National Security Council (MGK). It is headed by elite politicians and statesmen, out of whom all were convinced Kemalists; if this is less true now when Turkey is led by the AKP, it was at least true up until they won elections in 2002. The institutions virtually have free hand in deciding policies in regards to the Kurdish question, as Turkey’s other actors – most of the press, intellectuals, the civil society, and various political parties – have been silent on the issue, or had a non-involvement policy. The state institutions have continuously employed a strictly military policy when handling the southeast and the Kurdish population there. However, this military focused policy has come with a cost: “large-scale village evacuations and increasing refugee population, widespread human rights abuses, and the like”.<sup>68</sup> Turkish policy has been to eliminate the PKK through internal operations, cross-border raids and body counts, also leading to an increase in the human rights abuses. Apparently though, the military has taken steps to reduce these abuses,<sup>69</sup> one example being the human rights training, which is a part of the military education.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, the state has not reached its ultimate goal of permanent eradication of the PKK. The authors argue that “[t]he instruments and institutions employed by the state to handle the Kurdish problem clearly reflect the state’s conviction that the problem is primarily one of security, law and order, and violence promoted by external powers”. However, it is getting increasingly clear that the problem is not strictly security based; the Kurds sense of identity

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<sup>67</sup> Aydin, Mustafa, 2003, pp. 174-5

<sup>68</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, pp. 133-4; Gunter, Michael M, 2011 pp. 6; 155

<sup>69</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, pp. 138-41

<sup>70</sup> TSK’s official document regarding human rights education, retrieved from [[http://www.tsk.tr/ing/5\\_training/5\\_4\\_human\\_rights\\_education\\_in\\_the\\_turkish\\_armed\\_forces/human\\_rights\\_education\\_in\\_the\\_turkish\\_armed\\_forces.htm](http://www.tsk.tr/ing/5_training/5_4_human_rights_education_in_the_turkish_armed_forces/human_rights_education_in_the_turkish_armed_forces.htm)] accessed 2013-04-28

and the general consciousness of their situation are rising, and many are not affiliated with the PKK at all – there are several different Kurdish parties and organisations.<sup>71</sup> Hence, it is difficult for the state to “solve” the problem by military means; other measures are needed, which can be achieved through an active civil society and the like.

When it comes to the Turkish military, they are not only responsible for executing the policies regarding the Kurds; they are also instrumental in deciding them.<sup>72</sup> The military maintains a large and extensive presence in the southeast of the country, effectively forcing the PKK into a defensive position; despite this, however, they have not succeeded in destroying it. The authors deem it probable that the military will have to continue their presence in the region to avoid increased PKK activity. The military also bears a lot of the burden as to how the country as a whole is regarded from the West at it bears the main responsibility for the human rights abuses; the US and Europe become wary in their relations with Turkey when they peak. Turkey has been warned several times against using NATO sponsored equipment against the Kurds, yet the military continues to be the institution responsible for dealing with the issue in the southeast.<sup>73</sup>

As stated earlier, connected to the military it was the MGK which was the most influential institution in relation to the Kurdish question. Officially it is supposed to have a strictly advisory function but being built up by elite civil politicians, statesmen and military men, it is an extremely powerful institution and played an instrumental role in forming the 1982 constitution. The MGK has a quite conservative stance when it comes to the Kurds, and has suggested that the military/armed forces in the region be equipped with more arms, as well as wanting to promote education on “Turkish culture and identity”.<sup>74</sup> This is in line with the fact that the Kurdish language was outlawed, and the government even changed the names of villages and other urban areas and Kurdish citizens from Kurdish to Turkish ones.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) maintains a presence in the region and monitors anybody even suspected of involving in so called Kurdish nationalist activities. Further complicating the matter, there is also the Village Guards, which consists of Kurds who are voluntarily or forcibly anti-PKK. These village guards are known to having employed less

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<sup>71</sup> Uslu, Emrullah, 2007, pp. 159-160; Gunter, Michael M, 2011 pp. 2-3; Barkey & Fuller, 1998, p. 134

<sup>72</sup> Gunter, Michael M, 2011, p. 109; Barkey & Fuller, 1998, p. 139

<sup>73</sup> Gunter, Michael M. 2008. “The AKP Catalyst: Progressive Islamists and Ambitious Kurds.” *Georgetown Journal Of International Affairs* 9, no. 2: 59-68, p. 65; Barkey & Fuller, 1998, pp. 140-2

<sup>74</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, pp. 144-5; Gunter, Michael M, 2011, pp. 109-10

<sup>75</sup> Polat, Rabia Karakaya, 2008, p. 76; Uslu, Emrullah, 2007, p. 157

than professional methods in the battle against the PKK, effectively creating an additional level to the fight between the Turkish state and the PKK; “roving PKK teams routinely wiped out village guards, often including their entire families. Village guards, in turn, took action against suspected PKK activists or sympathizers in the villages, and they too included their opponents’ families”. These village guards are often targeted from two ways, both from the state which sometimes forces them to join by threatening with village evacuation amongst others, and from the PKK. Moreover, the Turkish state has trained several “special” teams which specialise in counterterrorist tactics. These teams are more often than not extremely brutal, killing innocents when a situation could have been solved by other means; they are known to dress in either civilian clothes or fake PKK uniforms. They effectively do the unofficial dirty work of the military; however, there is a growing fear of them even amongst the non-Kurdish population. They appear to be at least semi-autonomous from the army and authorities, but are accepted because of their efficiency in keeping the PKK in place.<sup>76</sup>

Even Kurdish activists not affiliated with the PKK or any other group turning to violent methods routinely have problems with the authorities; given the fact that virtually all Kurdish political activities are deemed illegal according to the clauses in the law dealing with sedition and territorial unity.<sup>77</sup> This would naturally pose a huge problem for any aspiring democratic state, not less so for Turkey. It seems very much that it, at least in the past, has been various state institutions and security apparatuses that have been responsible for dealing with the Kurdish questions. Other actors, such as the civil society, have had little or no say in decisions regarding the region.<sup>78</sup> It should be noted that while the civil society has certainly gained some importance in Turkey, and with it the impact of economic, cultural and humanitarian security issues, the country’s security policies still revolve around the traditional notions of “hard security”.<sup>79</sup> However, the notion of Turkish security policy actors has been broadened to that it now at least also includes media and public opinion instead of just the state apparatuses.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, pp. 145-9; Uslu, Emrullah, 2007, p. 160

<sup>77</sup> Act No. 3713 (Turkish Anti-Terrorism Law), retrieved from [http://www.opbw.org/nat\_imp/leg\_reg/turkey/anti-terror.pdf] accessed: 2013-05-09; Turkish Criminal Code (1926 version), retrieved from [http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file\_id=243676] accessed: 2013-05-09, article 312, see appendix 3 and appendix 4

<sup>78</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, pp. 150-1

<sup>79</sup> Aydin, Mustafa, 2003, p. 178

<sup>80</sup> Aydin, Mustafa, 2003, p. 180

### 3.5 The civil society and its impact on the Kurdish Question

A vibrant and dynamic civil society is crucial to solve the Kurdish question, since it – in the right environment – will work towards desecuritisising the issue. The Kurdish question is Turkey’s most pressing problem and has been so ever since the founding of the country. Furthermore, it is the major source of human rights violations in Turkey.<sup>81</sup> The problem lies between the state and a specific part of society, that is, the Kurds who speak up for their identity and aspirations.<sup>82</sup> As the PKK has focused much on a violent form of resistance, it has served to justify the highly securitised discourse the Turkish state has embraced, at least to a certain extent, and at the same time, the securitised policies of the government has been a contributing factor to the very formation of the PKK.<sup>83</sup> The Kurdish question has not only been the primary focus of the security establishment, however, but also for the civil society organisations (CSOs) in Turkey.<sup>84</sup>

Lesser argues that the recent development in Turkey has spurred a new range of actors when it comes to the security politics and strategic affairs; these include both secular establishments and private sector organisations such as TUSAID as well as purely civilian think tanks. He states that “public opinion is now a force to be reckoned with in the Turkish strategic debate”, which have led it to gradually align more and more with Western norms. The country is slowly reforming the concept of national security to be broader and more inclusive, but it is still very conservative and traditional; Turkey still holds a “military-centric view of security policy”.<sup>85</sup>

There are different types of CSOs in the country; they tend to be either “establishment” (those who have aligned with the official policy on the Kurdish issue and regard all things Kurdish as PKK) or “anti-establishment” (those who argue for cultural and minority rights for the Kurds, and speaking up against the human rights violations conducted by the state).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, p. xi

<sup>82</sup> Kaliber & Tocci, 2010, p. 194

<sup>83</sup> Gunter, Michael M, 2011, p. 6

<sup>84</sup> Defined here as “[A] very wide range of actors occupying the space between the state, the family and the market. We include professional associations, research centres and universities, trade unions, foundations, NGOs [non-governmental organisations], social movements, youth groups, charities, lobby groups, religious movements and media operators.” (Kaliber & Tocci, 2010, p. 192)

<sup>85</sup> Lesser, Ian, 2010, pp. 264-5

<sup>86</sup> Kaliber & Tocci, 2010, pp. 192-4

Traditionally it has been the establishment CSOs who have aligned with the securitising agenda of the Turkish state; however, some Kurdish or pro-Kurdish CSOs can also be found here. These are the organisations that have spoken up with a nationalist or distinct multiculturalist agenda, and have thus had a securitising effect either because they have not been willing or able to distance themselves enough from the PKK, or by being suspected of a hidden agenda because of the fact that they only treat the Kurdish question and not human rights in general. They have also tended to use securitised language, further adding to their securitising impact. The anti-establishment and establishment CSOs within this category have differing relations with the state, where the establishment typically enjoy good, or at the very least neutral, relations with no aggravation from the state. At the other end of the spectrum, with both legal and physical repercussions – ranging from torture and imprisonment to legal procedures or even killings – from the state, the anti-establishment CSOs are found.<sup>87</sup> This is naturally highly disturbing, especially when occurring in a country which prides itself with its democracy and fairness. However, some international CSOs and research centres also have relations that border on the neutral with the state, despite the fact that they may publicly condemn Turkey's consistent breaches of human rights.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, they tend to have an advantage when it comes to achieving true change in the Kurdish areas.

The civil society was a crucial factor in establishing a more stable and secure environment in the “calm” years between 1999 and 2003 – this was reflected both internally and externally. Actors other than the military and security establishment were permitted to have a say in both domestic and international policies, resulting in an increased goodwill in the relations between Turkey and Iraq for example.<sup>89</sup> The desecuritising CSOs, and increasingly the wider civil population, tend to argue that the Kurdish question can only be solved through democratisation, dialogue and other non-coercive means. They also tend to look at the wider spectrum of human rights rather than to focus on one single group, which affords them more credibility, and are typically either international or domestic organisations that create platforms for bilateral talks between Turks and Kurds and/or raise the human rights agenda.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Polat, Rabia Karakaya, 2008, p. 78; Kaliber & Tocci, 2010, pp. 198-201

<sup>88</sup> Kaliber & Tocci, 2010, pp. 203-4; 206

<sup>89</sup> Özcan, Mesut, 2011, p. 76

<sup>90</sup> Çiçek, Cuma. 2011. "Elimination or Integration of Pro-Kurdish Politics: Limits of the AKP's Democratic Initiative." *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 1: 15-26, p. 19; 24; Kaliber & Tocci, 2010, pp. 207-9; 212; Polat, Rabia Karakaya, 2008, p. 79

The Kurdish question has, from the very first day, been treated as a threat to Turkish security and thus been a highly securitised issue. This is even truer after the military coup in 1980, after which the oppression of the Kurds increased, and even found legal ground in the new constitution – especially in article 42, which prohibits the use of any other language than Turkish in education.<sup>91</sup> 1980 was also the decade in which there was a clear increase in PKK activity, creating a negative spiral where the state’s oppression fuelled PKK violence, and vice versa. Towards the end of the decade, in 1987, emergency law was declared in ten provinces in southeast Anatolia, and wasn’t lifted until fifteen years later.<sup>92</sup> Thus, one of the biggest problems in regards to the Kurdish question is that Turkey’s otherwise vibrant civil society, democratic institutions and free press have not yet extended to the Kurdish population. Instead, it is treated as a national security problem, rendering it off bounds for the majority of the population; it also seems as if up until now, the Turkish population have been indifferent or even happy to leave the handling of the Kurdish question to the country’s official institutions and military.<sup>93</sup>

The civil society in Turkey – especially post 1980 – has had to work towards achieving greater democracy and for the protection of human rights against the suspicion directed against them, mainly from state institutions. As the state itself has at times been run by the military, and at other been strongly influenced by it, it has made the civil society environment clearly hostile towards non-military CSOs. CSOs have had to battle against a restrictive state which limits their freedom of expression, assembly and association, all of which are needed to create a civil society that is alive and well. The establishment CSOs were early incorporated in the Turkish state’s security policies, because of their promotion of Kemalist views. On the other side of the spectrum are the non-establishment CSOs, which from the beginning have been seen as a threat to the national security of Turkey and have more often than not been outright banned, and thus have had to fight on two fronts: against the state institutions, and against the common understanding of “Turkishness” as a homogenous identity without space for ethnic or cultural minority rights.<sup>94</sup> However, at the very beginning of the 2000’s, things slowly started to change, and the scene opened up slightly for non- or desecuritising actors.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Lesser, Ian. 2005. “Ethnic and Religious Strains in Turkey.” *A Companion to the History of the Middle East / Edited by Youssef M. Choueiri*. Malden, Blackwell, 2005: 209-223, p. 214-5; Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, article 42

<sup>92</sup> Kaliber & Tocci, 2010, pp. 195-6

<sup>93</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, p. 3

<sup>94</sup> Kaliber & Tocci, 2010, pp. 196-7

<sup>95</sup> Polat, Rabia Karakaya, 2008, pp. 75-6

The AKP government seemed increasingly interested in desecuritisising the Kurdish question, and however contested it has been, one can argue that recent development clearly shows at least a will to see other than strictly military-focused attempts to a solution.<sup>96</sup>

The already securitised civil space in Turkey became even more so after the PKK emerged on the scene – also within this sector, all groups advocating Kurdish rights were seen as pawns of the PKK. Ironically, the fact that both Kurdish and pro-Kurdish political parties were banned meant that it became more and more unlikely to see any parties or CSOs operating independently of the PKK; one could argue that the policy of the Turkish state backfired, both for themselves and for the pro-Kurdish groups. This, in combination with the socio-economically underdeveloped environment in the Kurdish region, severely hindered the formation of a vibrant and dynamic Kurdish civil society.<sup>97</sup>

### **3.6 Foreign policy in Turkey: how it affects, and is affected by, the Kurds**

The Kurdish question is not a “problem” that is contained within Turkey’s borders; the Kurds and their struggle affect many other countries both regionally and internationally as they are “divided across international borders”. Thus, “[a]ny pretensions to ethnic unification of one of these peoples [Kurds, Mongols, Baluch, Punjabis etc.] therefore not only imply separatism of territory from one country but also a massive redrawing of the international boundaries in the whole region in which that nationality resides.” The result is that countries often cooperate to contain the separatist and/or nationalist threats of minority groups within their respective territories, precisely as Turkey has done with both Iran and Syria after the 2003 Iraq war. Moreover, it affects the international community in the sense that a huge number of Kurds have fled economic and human hardship in the southeast of Turkey to mainly Europe or America. Hence, the international community is forced to take a stance in relation to the Kurds; this is especially true for NATO and the EU.<sup>98</sup>

When it comes to Turkey’s wider foreign policy, it has historically been Europe- and US centred and has had little or no interest in dealing with regional developments.<sup>99</sup> Turkey’s two main ideologies have fundamentally different views; Kemalism opts for a non-religious view

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<sup>96</sup> Polat, Rabia Karakaya, 2008, pp. 76

<sup>97</sup> Kaliber & Tocci, 2010, pp. 197-8

<sup>98</sup> Barkey, Henry J., and Fuller, Graham E. 1998. *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*. Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998, p. 2; Gunter, Michael M, 2011, p. 2

<sup>99</sup> Lesser, Ian, 2010, pp. 264-6

where Turkey steers clear of the cleft between Sunnis and Shi'as to instead focus on the secularist and non-sectarian side of foreign policy. Neo-Ottomanism on the other hand opens for an inclusive Sunni identity throughout the region as well as inside Turkey (as a common denominator between Turks and Kurds) and hence takes a clear position against the “threat” of the Shi'a countries (the Shi'a crescent, in which Iran naturally is the largest factor, but also includes parts of Lebanon and Bahrain) in the Middle East.<sup>100</sup> In true Kemalist spirit, the country has previously focused on the importance of a unitary nation and due to this steered clear of regional conflicts. However, lately it has been more and more inclined to act in the Middle East as it is seen as a high risk region for increased terrorism and separatism – something that Turkey is keen to avoid. Hence, the new Turkish policy seems to be to act while the risk factor is still outside Turkey's borders;<sup>101</sup> indeed, Turkey has operated under its “zero problems with neighbours” policy (formulated by foreign minister Davutoğlu in 2005) and has taken a proactive stance ever since.<sup>102</sup>

The Kurdish question not only affected Turkey's internal politics, but its external relations as well; when it came to relations with all Turkey's neighbouring states, the Kurdish question quickly evolved to being the indisputably most important factor. This has been especially true in the latter half of the 1980's. It also became an increasingly more important factor in relations with the West, as many of the European countries came to look at the issue as one where an ethnic group were being oppressed by an authoritarian state.<sup>103</sup> Considering Turkey's long-stated goal of EU membership, the AKP has developed a programme aimed at managing the Kurdish “problem” of the country. Between the 1980's and the 1990's, the struggle against PKK and its violent resistance in south-east Turkey was the main security issue for Turkey, and it influenced virtually all of the country's regional policies. Before the capture of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, Turkey was close to engaging in open conflict with Syria as it functioned as a sanctuary for the infamous PKK leader. Lesser argues that the Kurdish activism will remain at the centre of Turkey's “strategic outlook”. He further argues that it might well be the cause that will reaffirm the status of the military in the country, which have been on the decline, and further spark nationalistic interests.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, p. 20

<sup>101</sup> Lesser, Ian, 2010, p 258

<sup>102</sup> Özcan, Mesut. 2011. “From Distance to Engagement: Turkish Policy towards the Middle East, Iraq and Iraqi Kurds.” *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 2: 71-92, p. 73; Çiçek, Cuma, 2011, p. 17

<sup>103</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, pp. 10-2

<sup>104</sup> Lesser, Ian, 2010, pp. 261-2



The current ruling party in Turkey, the AKP, draws heavily on the principles of neo-Ottomanism where one of the main goals is to re-evaluate the heritage from the Ottoman era, and by doing so finding space within Turkey for more than one ethnic and/or religious identity may exist. This should not be seen as islamising the politics but rather viewed in the context of an Ottoman history of multinationalism and an attempt to open up the rather narrow Kemalist idea of a “Turkish” Turkey.<sup>105</sup> Hence, a neo-Ottomanist policy is not as much at odds with the Kurdish strives for ethnic, political and cultural rights while still being Turkish citizens. Where Kemalism has sought to assimilate the Kurds at all costs, neo-Ottomanism has been more willing to let Islam be a common ground upon which a shared identity can be formed. Understandably, the Kemalists are not keen on this idea; it is seen as a threat to the very foundation of the state of Turkey. Both the thoughts of awarding more rights to the Kurds and the idea of letting Islam become the common denominator goes against the traditional values of secularism and nationalism – thus, Kemalists have sought to confront rather than to cooperate.<sup>106</sup>

While the invasion of Iraq has brought severe hardship for the majority of the people in the country, it has also meant a semi-autonomous Kurdish region located in the north of Iraq. This is not a development that is appreciated by the Turkish government and hence it has amplified its relations with the three countries facing the same “challenge”, Iraq, Iran and Syria.<sup>107</sup> While Syria’s perceived support for the PKK (before the capture of Abdullah Öcalan) made it a number one threat to Turkish national security, Iran on the other hand has traditionally not been seen as a direct threat – Ankara has been more concerned with the spreading of political Islam from Iran to Turkey than anything else. Iraq has risen quickly as a top security concern after the first Gulf War when it became increasingly unstable and a perceived haven for Kurdish nationalism and separatism.<sup>108</sup> However, its relations with Syria have bettered considerably since the capture of Öcalan in 1999.<sup>109</sup> Below, Turkey’s relations with said countries will be briefly discussed.

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<sup>105</sup> Sahin, Mustafa Gokhan. 2011. “Turkey between the Ottoman Past and the Kemalist Republic.” *Yale Journal Of International Affairs* no. 2: 140, p. 140

<sup>106</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, p. 15

<sup>107</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, p. 21; Perthes, Volker. 2010. “Turkey’s Role in the Middle East: An Outsider’s Perspective.” *Insight Turkey* 12, no. 4: 1-8, p. 2

<sup>108</sup> Lesser, Ian, 2010, pp. 264-6

<sup>109</sup> Karakoç, Jülide. 2010. “The impact of the Kurdish Identity on Turkey’s Foreign Policy from the 1980s to 2008.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 6: 919-942, p. 925

### *Turkey and Iraq*

Turkish relations with Iraq are deeply influenced by the Kurdish presence in both countries, as well as the Turkmen minority within Iraq. The Turkish policies in both the 1988 war between Iraq and Iran and the first Gulf War were formulated with concern to the Kurdish question. Mostly, Turkey was concerned about the possibility of the development of a Kurdish autonomous region, as well as the looming conflict between the external parties involved – Iran, Syria, Turkey and the Islamists – who all seemed to favour differing groups in northern Iraq.<sup>110</sup>

When it comes to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, it was a development that almost all sectors in the Turkish society wanted to avoid; the military, the AKP and the general public alike. The main concern for Turkey was naturally the insecurity of having a state of war just across the border, but also the Kurdish presence in northern Iraq was cause for concern. Having been a safe haven for PKK guerrilla fighters for a long time, Turkey did not want to risk an increased opportunity for an autonomous or semi-autonomous Kurdistan in the region. It was widely believed that most PKK attacks were conducted from northern Iraq and not from inside Turkish territory.<sup>111</sup> Within Iraq, regardless of ideological conviction, Turkish officials were deeply concerned of the status of the Turkmen in the area, specifically in Kirkuk. There is a looming possibility that Turkey launches new operations in the north of Iraq to counter Kurdish interests in that area; to answer to renewed PKK operations or protecting the ethnic Turkmen, or both.<sup>112</sup>

Hence, it is clear that regardless of which camp one chooses to look at – be it the neo-Ottomanists or the Kemalists – they share the common trait that neither looks at the emergence of an independent Kurdistan in Iraq favourably. However, they still differ in their preferred way to handle the situation; where neo-Ottomanism wants to cooperate, Kemalism is not even willing to open for dialogue with the Kurds. Generally, the AKP has had a strong support in the Kurdish provinces and they certainly appear to be much more willing to concede to the democratic demands from the Kurds. However, they definitely don't want to

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<sup>110</sup> Fuller, Graham E. 2008. *The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*. United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington D.C., 2008, p. 98-9

<sup>111</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, pp. 17-9; Fuller, Graham E, 2008, p. 100; Park, Bill. 2008. "Iraqi Futures, Turkish Options" *European Security* 17, no. 1: 85-104, p. 86

<sup>112</sup> Oğuzlu, Tarik. 2008. "Turkey's Northern Iraq Policy: Competing Perspectives." *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 3: 5-22, p. 12; Lesser, Ian, 2010, p. 273; Fuller, Graham E, 2008, p. 101

be seen as being too soft towards the PKK and thus the situation requires a precarious brinkmanship.<sup>113</sup>

### *Turkey, Iran and Syria*

When it comes to Turkish relations with Iran, they have always been strained at best; the exception being the brief period of cooperation during the Cold War. With the Islamic revolution, however, relations between the country quickly deteriorated and the state of rivalry between the countries was back on square one by the 1980's.<sup>114</sup> However, the countries have once again found common ground in their shared interest of containing the Kurdish threats, and relations between Turkey and Iran have improved drastically under AKP's rule.<sup>115</sup> As a result of the improvement in diplomatic relations, trade increased as well and the countries could begin cooperating on the Kurdish issue.

2004 saw the formation of a Kurdish activist group active in Iran, The Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), a sister group to the PKK, which coincided with the de facto launching of the Turkey-Iran High Security commission (even though it was in fact formed as early as 1988, but not active until after the fall of Saddam Hussein). Even though no formal alliance has been formed between the two countries, Turkey has arrested PJAK members operating against Iran inside Turkish territory, and Iran has done the same with PKK members in Iran.<sup>116</sup> However, the two countries are still wary towards one another, especially due to the fact that they both aspire to become hegemons in the region; should Turkey's leverage increase, Iran's will decrease and vice versa. This creates a tense relationship between the two countries at best, and an outright hostile one at worst.<sup>117</sup>

Similarly, Turkey's new and improved relations with Syria stems from the shared interest of containing the Kurdish issue, as well as Syria's decision to expel Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. All three states are of the opinion that the development in Iraq has greatly increased the risk of Kurdish separatists and nationalists and their claims of a (semi)autonomous Kurdistan. Here too the two ideologies of Turkey differ slightly; where the neo-Ottomanism (and the AKP) sees no danger in playing a role as a regional actor in a wide sense, Kemalists is

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<sup>113</sup> Oğuzlu, Tarik, 2008, p. 14; Taspınar, Ömer, 2008, pp. 20-1

<sup>114</sup> Fuller, Graham E, 2008, p. 107-8; Taspınar, Ömer, 2008, p. 21

<sup>115</sup> Turkey Defence & Security Report, p. 78

<sup>116</sup> Taspınar, Ömer, 2008, pp. 22-3

<sup>117</sup> Turkey Defence & Security Report, p. 79; Özcan, Mesut, 2011, p. 89

traditionally wary and would cooperate with Syria only to contain the threats of Kurdish nationalists due to disagreements on a wide range of issues. Most importantly, the Kemalists extreme consciousness of their Turkishness has been at odds with the fact that Syria has been a centre for Arab nationalism in the past.<sup>118</sup> However, given the recent development in the region with the Syrian civil war and the Arab spring, relations between Syria and Turkey has been on the decline once again; the Syrian sister organisation of PKK, the PYD, has profited from the tumultuous situation in the country and are now a force to be reckoned with both within Syria, and in the region at large.<sup>119</sup>

### **3.7 Future implications of Turkish policies**

The future of the Kurds depends on which way the country at large chooses; do they continue to drift to the West, or do they seek more involvement in the Middle East and Eurasia<sup>120</sup>? If the answer lies in the first option, Turkey will likely be forced to seek cooperation with the Kurds rather than continuing its “containment” policies. On the other hand, should option two be chosen, Turkey will have freer hands to deal with the Kurds as it sees fit, without “worrying about the reaction from the liberal West”.<sup>121</sup> Regardless of each, it is probable that the Kurdish question will remain at the top of Turkey’s security agenda. It has been argued that military means alone will never solve the question, even though it can be argued that Turkey does have a legitimate fear of Kurdish terrorism.<sup>122</sup> However, it seems increasingly likely that the peace process will be revived once again, especially due to events such as Öcalan’s call for extended talks in 2011, and the Turkish government’s open admittance of such talks in late 2012.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, there is much at stake in the near future, and whether or not the peace process will lead somewhere yet remains to be seen.

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<sup>118</sup> Fuller, Graham E, 2008, pp. 93-4; 96; Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, pp. 24-5

<sup>119</sup> Tol, Gönül. 2013. “Is Turkey Ready for a Kurdish Peace?.”, retrieved from [http://www.mei.edu/content/turkey-ready-kurdish-peace] accessed: 2013-04-25

<sup>120</sup> Used here to describe the geographical area in the borderland between Europe and Asia, including countries such as Georgia, Russia, Armenia and Kazakhstan.

<sup>121</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, pp. 27-8

<sup>122</sup> Taspinar, Ömer, 2008, p. 28

<sup>123</sup> Öcalan, Abdullah. 2011. *Prison Writings: The PKK and the Kurdish Question in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, London, Transmedia Publishing Ltd, 2011, p. 66; Tol, Gönül, 2013

## 4 Conclusion

It is clear that Turkey has been extremely security conscious ever since Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the nation in 1923. Atatürk early had a modernistic vision for his country, something that has continued to influence Turkey even to the present day. His ideology, Kemalism, was the only in the country from the 20's until the late 40's when the political scene opened up slightly to allow other parties. The new parties that sprung up had a profound impact on the country, and from the fifties onwards Turkey struggled to develop into a true democracy. However, there were a few obstacles constantly standing in the way; the most important of these were the Kurdish question. Being in clear majority in the south-eastern parts of the country, the Kurds have been a constant nail in the eye of the modern, secularist and ethnocentric nation state. The state thus created a securitised issue where it was actually not necessary. The legacy after Atatürk has been one which especially revered Turkishness and thus, there has been no space at all for any other identities. Both the Treaty of Lausanne and the constitution of Turkey (1982 version) vow to protect the non-Muslim minorities in the country, just as had been done during the Ottoman era.

The feeling of national security in Turkey has always been intimately connected to its territorial integrity. Any and all attempts, or mere suspected attempts, to threaten this have been beaten down with a vengeance, just as witnessed during the Kurdish uprisings in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The uprisings were not seen as an oppressed people fighting for cultural and linguistic rights and a better socioeconomical reality; they were seen as terrorist attempts to divide, weaken and/or disassemble the Turkish nation. This mind-set has survived throughout the years, and it is only in recent years that politicians and civilians have been able to speak openly about the Kurdish question. In late 1984, a thus far unknown Kurdish party – the PKK – launched its insurgency, effectively unleashing a conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish state that has not been far from a full fledged civil war. Since that day, the PKK has always been at the very top of the Turkish security agenda. The state has chosen to employ a strictly securitised policy when attempting to deal with the Kurdish question, leaving little or no space for the civil society or other actors to join the “game”. This thesis has shown the importance of opening up for the civil society in dealing with the Kurdish question in Turkey; it is instrumental in finding the democratic solution Turkey so desperately needs to fulfil its long vision of joining the EU.

Turkey's relations with its neighbouring countries have also been severely affected by the Kurdish presence in the country; the Kurds have been instrumental in deciding which policy to employ when it comes to virtually all external relations. As the Kurds are dispersed over mainly three countries besides Turkey – Iraq, Syria, and Iran –, Ankara has been forced to take them into consideration when negotiating with any of the three governments; for example, Turkey has been extremely unwilling to see a (semi)autonomous Kurdistan in the north of Iraq, and has thus adjusted its policies accordingly. Not until recent times has Turkey chosen to employ a proactive regional policy; beforehand the country chose to meddle in its own business only and not care too much about what happened beyond its borders. It would not be unlikely if this too was a result of the Kurdish question; being so preoccupied with an almost-civil war, and dealing with the subsequent human rights abuses was quite enough in itself.

This thesis has tried to show that the Kurdish question in Turkey continues to affect nearly all policy decisions in the country; due to the fact that it has been a securitised problem from the first day, the military has had an extreme power throughout Turkey's modern history. The TSK and its leaders have thus had a unique opportunity to intervene in the decisions of politicians when they deem them to stray too far from the ideals of Atatürk. This has been seen in the military coups of 1960, 1971 and 1980 as well as in the fact that the current constitution was largely formed by the armed forces. Moreover, the armed forces penetrate virtually every level of the society, and have employed methods quite far beyond what is deemed acceptable by the world at large. This is illustrated in the phenomena of village guards in the Kurdish areas of Turkey, where Kurdish peasants forcibly or voluntarily joined a pro-government and anti-PKK guerrilla which employed conventional warfare as well as torture, kidnappings and blackmail. However, it was not unusual that these methods were employed by civilian Kurds as retaliation; a negative spiral had been effectively created, where the state's securitisation policy created a violent environment which justified the initial and continued securitisation.

In conclusion, one can clearly see that the Kurdish question in Turkey has affected all levels of security policies in the country, both external and internal, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. A vast majority of the policy decisions taken in Turkey since its formation have been formulated with the Kurds in regards, and thus reinforcing the securitisation. To be sure, the analysis has shown the importance of broadening the concept of

security so that other actors and referents than the military are taken into regards in Turkey. The civil society, media organisations, think tanks and universities are all appropriate as both actors and referents, and the wider civil population – Kurds included – has to be taken into regards as a referent group. The thesis has shown that if other actors would be allowed to partake in the Kurdish issue and contribute with something other than further securitisation, a solution might be found. Recent developments, both before and after 2005, indeed seem to prove this hypothesis, but more research needs to be conducted on the subject. However, one can see that the Kurdish question indeed has been the top security concern for Turkey since its formation in 1923. It seems unlikely that it will be taken off the security agenda regardless if the recent peace talks prove successful or not, even though it might well be “downgraded” so it no longer dominates the top spot. The inclusion of other actors and referents will indeed contribute to these probable developments, but it remains to be seen how Turkey’s leading elite will choose to act in the future. Indeed, this would be a very interesting subject for further research as the Kurdish question still continues to affect Turkey’s policies. Moreover, additional research on the recent peace developments and the historical open talks between the government and Abdullah Öcalan will be of great importance – it might even be the beginning of an end to the conflict.

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## 6 Appendices

### 6.1 Appendix 1 – Act No. 1850<sup>124</sup>

— 2 2 3 —

#### İsyan mmtakasında işlenen efağın suç sayılmayacağına dair kanun (Resmî Gazete ile neşir ve ilâm: 29/VII/1931 - Sayı: 1859)

No.  
1850

Kabul tarihi  
20 - VII - 1931

BİRİNCİ MADDE — Erciş, Zilân, Ağrıdağ havalisinde vuku bulan isyanla, bunu müteakip birinci umumî müfettişlik nuntakası ve Erzineanın Plümür kazası dahilinde yapılan takip ve tedip hareketleri münasebeti erile 20 haziran 1930 dan I kânunuevvel 1930 tarihine kadar askerî kuvvetler ve Devlet memurları ve bunlarla birlikte hareket eden bekçi, korucu, milis ve ahali tarafından isyanın ve bu isyanla alâkadar vakaların tenkili emrinde gerek müstakilleri ve gerek müştereken işlenmiş efağ ve harekât suç sayılmaz.

İKİNCİ MADDE — Bu kanun neşri tarihinden muteberdir.

ÜÇÜNCÜ MADDE — Bu kanunun icrasına Adliye ve Dahiliye vekilleri me-murdur.

26 temmuz 1931

.....

*Cumhuriyet Reisliğine yazılan tezkerenin tarih ve numarası* : 21 - VII -1931 ve 1/49  
*Bu kanunun neşir ve ilânının Başvekilliğe bildirildiğine dair Cumhuriyet Reisliğinden gelen tezkerenin tarih ve numarası* : 26 - VII -1931 ve 4/443  
*Bu kanunun müzakerelerini gösteren zabıtların cilt Sayfa*  
*cilt ve sayfa numaraları* : 1 108  
3 74,242:243

<sup>124</sup> Retrieved from

[[http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR\\_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc010/kanuntbmmc010/kanuntbmmc01001850.pdf](http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc010/kanuntbmmc010/kanuntbmmc01001850.pdf)] accessed: 2013-05-09

## 6.2 Appendix 2 – Unofficial translations to Act No. 1850<sup>125</sup>

“Det talas om olika områden såsom Erciş, Zilân, Ağrıdağ där uppror uppstått. Lagen föreskriver straffrihet för de handlingar och operationer som begås individuellt eller tillsammans av ditsända militära trupper, statstjänstemän, samt med dessa tillkommande vakter, livvakter som har till uppgift att stävja upproret.”<sup>126</sup>

”Murders and other actions committed individually or collectively, from June 20, 1930, to December 10, 1930, by the representatives of the state or the province, by the military or civil authorities, by the local authorities, by guards or militiamen, or by any civilian having helped the above or acted on their behalf, during the pursuit and extermination of the revolts which broke out in Ercis [sic], Zilan [sic], Agridag (Ararat) [sic] and the surrounding areas, including the surrounding areas, including Pulumur [sic] in Erzincan [sic] province and the area of the First Inspectorate, will not be considered as crimes (Article 1).”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> See 6.1

<sup>126</sup> Translated by Betül Cetinkaya, 2013-05-10

<sup>127</sup> Kendal, 1993, p. 56

### **6.3 Appendix 3 – Act no. 312 (from the 1926 Turkish Criminal Code)<sup>128</sup>**

**Madde 312** - (Değişik madde: 06/02/2002 - 4744 S.K../2. md.)

Bir cürmü alenen öven veya iyi gördüğünü söyleyen veya halkı kanuna uymamaya tahrik eden kimseye altı aydan iki yıla kadar hapis cezası verilir.

Sosyal sınıf, ırk, din, mezhep veya bölge farklılığına dayanarak, halkı birbirine karşı kamu düzeni için tehlikeli olabilecek bir şekilde düşmanlığa veya kin beslemeye alenen tahrik eden kimseye bir yıldan üç yıla kadar hapis cezası verilir.

Halkın bir kısmını aşağılayıcı ve insan onurunu zedeleyecek bir şekilde tahkir eden kimseye de birinci fıkradaki ceza verilir.

Yukarıdaki fıkralarda yazılı suçlar 311 inci maddenin ikinci fıkrasında belirtilen araçlar veya şekillerle işlendiğinde verilecek cezalar bir katı oranında artırılır.

**Madde 312/a** - (Ek madde: 21/11/1990 - 3679/21 md.)

Hayat, sağlık veya mal bakımından halk arasında endişe, korku, panik yaratmak amacıyla alenen tehditte bulunanlara iki yıldan dört yıla kadar hapis ve üçmilyon liradan onmilyon liraya kadar ağır para cezası verilir.

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<sup>128</sup> Retrieved from [[http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file\\_id=243676](http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=243676)] accessed: 2013-05-09

#### **6.4 Appendix 4 – Unofficial translations to Act No. 312 from the 1926 Turkish Criminal Code<sup>129</sup>**

**“Artikel 312 - (Ändrad artikel:. 2002/02/06 - 4744 SK / 2.)**

Den som lovordar en brottslig gärning, eller ger uttryck för att den skulle vara bra eller uppmanar folket till att inte lyda lagen kan straffas med fängelse från sex månader till två år.

Den som med anspelning på social klass, ras, religion, sekt eller regionala skillnader, på ett sätt som kan störa och hota den allmänna ordningen, offentligt förleder folket till att hysa hat eller skapa fientlighet sinsemellan, skall straffas med fängelse upp till tre år för alla.

Den som förolämpar en viss grupp i samhället på ett sätt som skadar dess värdighet skall döms enligt första stycket.

Om de brott som beskrivs i ovannämnda stycken begås med fordon/ vehicles/tools eller på det sätt såsom det beskrivs i artikel 311, andra stycket, skall påföljderna fördubblas.

**Artikel 312 / a - (Artikel:. 21/11/1990 - 3679/21 art).**

Den som med hot om att framkalla fara för liv, hälsa och egendom hos allmänheten har för avsikt att skapa rädsla, ångest och panik hos allmänheten dömdes till fängelse, lägst 2 år och högst 4 år samt till att utge skadestånd på minst tre miljoner lira och högst tio miljoner lira.”<sup>130</sup>

”[...] Article 312 of the Turkish Penal Code notoriously could make mere verbal or written support for Kurdish rights cause one to be charged with ‘provoking hatred or animosity between groups of different race, religion, region or social class.’”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> See 6.3

<sup>130</sup> Translated by Betül Cetinkaya, 2013-05-10

<sup>131</sup> Gunter, Michael M, 2011, p. 97