THE POLICY OF TURKEY AND KUWAIT TOWARDS IRAQI QUESTION

Veysel AYHAN*

Abstract

The main purpose of the article is to evaluate the policy of Kuwait and Turkey towards new Iraq emerged after the invasion of the country. The article consists of three parts. The first part deals with Turkey-Kuwait relations in terms of Iraq-Kuwait relations. In this part we focus on Turkish foreign policy and its reaction to Iraqi territorial claim and then invasion of Kuwait. The second part contains a comparative study about Turkey's and Kuwait's foreign policies during the post-occupation era. The main purpose of this part is to evaluate the effects of Iraqi invasion by US on the national interest of Turkey and Kuwait. Therefore the last part of study deals with cooperation and conflicts of interest between Turkey and Kuwait in respect of national interest.

Key Words: Kuwait, Turkish foreign policy, The US interests, Kuwait's international relations.

TÜRKİYE VE KUVEYT'İN IRAK SORUNUNA YÖNELİK POLİTİKALARI

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye ve Kuveyt'in, ABD'nin Irak işgalinden sonra Irak'a yönelik politikalarını analiz etmektir. Bu bağlamda, makale 3 bölümden oluşmaktadır. Birinci bölümde, Türkiye Kuveyt ilişkileri, Irak Kuveyt ilişkileri üzerinden iredelenecek ve Irak'ın toprak talebi ve Kuveyt'in işgaline Türkiye'nin tepkisi analiz edilecektir. İkinci bölümde, Türkiye ve Kuveyt'in dış politikasının, Irak'ın işgal sonrası sürecinde nasıl çizildiği üzerinde durulacaktır. Son olarak ise, Türkiye ve Kuveyt'in işbirliği ve ayrışma noktaları kendi ulusal çıkarları açısından analiz edilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kuveyt, Türk dış politikası, Amerikan çıkarları, Kuveyt'in uluslararası ilişkileri.

Introduction

Kuwait's administrative status and border lines during the Ottoman Empire have always been on the agenda of Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations. Thus, after Saddam invaded Kuwait on 2nd of August, Iraq formally annexed Kuwait, and on the 28th of August that it became the

19th province of Iraq in response, the coalition of countries that forced Iraq out of Kuwait. Kuwait's basic policy for the future of Iraq can be assessed as High Politics. Kuwait thinks differently in the context of Iraq's independence and the protection of Iraq's political unity and territorial integrity. But on the other hand Turkey emphasizes Iraq's unity and integrity and supports the regional cooperation attempts in this framework.

The Iraqi Invasion and Turkey's Reaction

Kuwait's administrative status and border lines during the Ottoman Empire have always been on the agenda of Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations. Since the foundation of Iraq, it has claimed ownership of land in Kuwait and Iraq subsequently invaded in August 1990. The land dispute between Iraq and Kuwait led to the invasions of Kuwait and then Iraq after the Cold War. Therefore, it is better to emphasize the core of the problem before discussing the invasions of Iraq and Kuwait. Iraq's primary claim that Kuwait belonged to Iraqi territory is based on the fact that during the Ottoman Empire, Kuwait was governed as a district of the province of Basra, for instance, during the ruling of Sheikh Cabir Al Sabah (1815-1859). In 1829, Ottoman Empire flags were flown by Kuwait's ships. Mithat Pasha, the governor of Baghdad, visited Kuwait in the late 1871, and after confirming that Kuwait was a district of Basra province, he appointed Sheikh Abdullah to be its governor. However, Mithat Pasha agreed with Sheikh Abdullah that no other flags apart from Ottoman ones would be displayed on Kuwait's ships. During the time of Mithat Pasha, Sheikh Abdullah and his brother Sheikh Mubarak went on an expedition at the head of their own troops to capture Al Hasa (Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 1999: 44, 52, 6061). It is possible to give more examples that Kuwait was a district of Basra province during the Ottoman Empire. However, it should be recognized that Kuwait has always been autonomous, and that there were never any military bases there, despite its submission to the Ottomans. In fact, after the secret Protectorate Agreement between Sheikh Mubarak and Britain, Kuwait fell under the authority of Britain (Slot, 2005: 113-114). Although the conflicts concerning Kuwait partially ended after Istanbul Agreement was signed in 1913, World War I broke out and the agreement could not be sustained (Lauterpacht et al, 1991: 266-367). After World War I, during both the mandate government and after the 1958 coup d'état when Iraq gained independence, from time to time Iraq put its historical claims on the agenda. Some of the important leaders who struggled for the annexation of Kuwait were Faisal I, King Gazi in the pre World War I era and General Kasim in the independence era. While General Kasim increased his military troop levels in 1962, British and Arab forces supported Kuwait, and a possible invasion

attempt was prevented (Ayhan and Pirinçci, 2008). In 1963, the Baathist Iraqi government recognized Kuwait, but they didn't end their historical claims to Kuwait. Although Iraq recognized Kuwait's independence, they kept their historical claim on the table until August 1990. Thus, after Saddam invaded Kuwait on 2nd of August, he said on 8th of August that Kuwait had been annexed and on the 28th of August that it became the 19th province of Iraq, showing that this issue had not been resolved over time.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait, the UN Security Council met, at the US's behest, and organized the largest military coalition since World War II, and enacted Resolution 660 which stated that Iraq was threatening international peace and order and directed the state to withdraw from Kuwait immediately and unconditionally. After Saddam refused to withdraw, on the 6th of August, the Security Council enacted Resolution 661, providing economic and political embargoes on both Kuwait and Iraq; and the Security Council Sanctions Committee was established to enforce the sanctions. Turkey expressed support for Resolutions 660 and 661, and ceased all trade activity, and closed its oil pipe lines, without waiting for the establishment of the Sanctions Committee.

As the northern neighbor of Iraq, Turkey's support for the Kuwaiti government was important for ending the occupation. Realizing this, Saddam made some efforts to affect Turkey's policies at the beginning of the occupation. On the 5th of August, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Taha Yasin Ramazan arranged a critical visit to Turkey. A meeting was held between President Özal and Taha Yasin Ramazan. That meeting concerning Iraqi expectations from Turkey, such as support for the occupation of Kuwait, caused Turkey to change her policies, expecting that the occupation would be ended in a short time (Gözen, 2000). Thus, on the 3rd of August, Özal had refused President Bush's demand to close oil pipe lines, but he changed his policy after meeting with Iraqi representative. He said that he would strive to end the occupation in a phone call with President Bush (Pauly, 2005: 46-47). After that call, following the resolution of UN Security Council numbered 661, Turkey imposed broad sanctions on Iraq on the 7th of August. In this context, all trade activities with Iraq and Kuwait under occupation, including the importation of oil and the exportation of medical supplies, were halted, and capital and property belonging to Iraqis and Kuwaitis were frozen. President Özal's anti-occupation policies captured the attention of Kuwait. Sheikh Saad, Crown Prince of Kuwait, arranged a special visit to Turkey on the 13th of August 1990, and expressed appreciation for Turkey's support. Özal implemented his decisions

immediately, working with the US and the UN Security Council to end the occupation of Kuwait. Moreover, just after the invasion, thanks to intensive diplomacy, Turkey struggled very hard to maintain the economic, diplomatic and political sanctions imposed on Iraq. Özal supported both the deployment of NATO soldiers in Turkey and the use of Incirlik air base by US forces during eventual operations. In this sense, it was determined that NATO forces deployed in Turkey could open a second front against Iraq, if needed. Turkey's diplomatic, logistic and indirect military support for the operations of the 17th of January was the beginning of a very critical period in Kuwaiti-Turkish relations. Besides NATO forces, Turkey deployed 120 thousand soldiers to the Iraqi border before the war, forcing Iraq to change its defense strategy. When Özal's active policy during crisis is considered, 120 thousand soldiers garrisoned on the border was a threat risk for Saddam's regime (Gözen, 2000: 248-271).

Consequently, Turkish diplomatic efforts to save Kuwait profoundly affected relations between the two states. In other words, after 1991 Kuwaiti-Turkish relations overcame the negative effects of historical misunderstandings, and began to develop on a new basis. Both states supported US forces for the resolution of regional problems and the reconstruction of Iraq. But, Turkish-Kuwaiti relations progressed under the pressure of diverging interests and threat assessment in 2003 when the military invasion of Iraq was being planned and put into effect.

Prospects for Cooperation and the Clash of Interests

After the 1991 invasion, Kuwait cooperated with the US in foreign and domestic policy. The Security and Cooperation Agreement signed in 1991 was extended for 10 years in 2001. As a matter of fact, Kuwait supported the Iraq invasion plans of the Bush administration much more than other states in the region. Beyond the 250 thousand US soldiers deployed in Kuwait, 60% of Kuwaiti lands were made available for US soldiers to use in operations. In 2008, when the withdrawal of US soldiers from Iraq was being considered, Kuwait's government opposed it. In other words, Kuwait does not want US soldiers to withdraw from Iraq. Kuwait prefers for the withdrawal to be limited, and for the US to keep enough military capability in Iraq, since it benefits them militarily and in terms of security. The Kuwaiti government is uncomfortable with the strengthening of Shiites, and will not even consider reopening its embassy in Iraq. On the other hand, although Kuwait's official policy is to protect the territorial integrity of Iraq, they expect a loosely centralized

system to be established, with Iraq divided into federal regions. In fact, it is remarkable that the Kurdish leader Mesud Barzani was welcomed as a head of state when he arranged a visit to Kuwait in February 2009 for the purpose of negotiations.

On the other hand, Turkey did not support the invasion of Iraq, because of the Turkish Grand National Assembly's refusal in the resolution of March 1, 2003. In the post invasion era, Turkey officially recognized the central Iraqi administration in Baghdad, opposed the federal system, and blocked the Kurds' political, economic and territorial expansion policies. So, the clash of interests between Turkey and Kuwait that started during the invasion of Iraq, when both states provided US soldiers easy access, worsened in subsequent discussions about the future of Iraq. After 2003, while Kuwait cooperated with USA in foreign and domestic policy, Turkey did not cooperate with US Middle East policies. Especially with respect to Syria, Iran, Hezbollah and HAMAS, Turkey again pursued diverging policies. Since the invasion of Iraq, Turkey's and Kuwait's interest and threat assessments have changed because of this crisis. In this framework, it will be beneficial to analyze Turkish and Kuwaiti foreign policies comparatively in the context of the Iraq issue.

The Clash of Interests between Turkey and Kuwait

The leading clash of interest between Turkey and Kuwait is the Iraq problem. Before discussing Kuwait's Iraq policy, it is better to explain Turkey's Iraq policy. In the explanatory note published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the most important points for Turkey in the context of Iraq and Iraqi relations are listed as follows (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010):

"1-The protection of Iraq's independence, political unity and territorial integrity.

2-The protection of peace and security and giving support for the democratization process in Iraq.

3-Supporting the reconstruction and economic development of Iraq.

4-Iraq's natural wealth being a common resource for all Iraqis and fair use of them for all.

5-Supporting the Turkmen for economic and social development in the political structure of Iraq.

6-Determination of a special status for Kirkuk that can reflect the consensus of all societies living in this province.

7-Development of Turkish-Iraqi relations in all respects.

8-Prevention of PKK activities in Northern Iraq and PKK attacks on our country from this region."

Kuwait's basic policy for the future of Iraq can be assessed as *High Politic*s. Its aim is to create an Iraq whose political unity is weak. Kuwait thinks differently in the context of Iraq's independence and the protection of Iraq's political unity and territorial integrity. Turkey emphasizes Iraq's unity and integrity and supports the regional cooperation attempts in this framework. In fact, Ankara became the pioneer of the Neighboring States of Iraq Process and allowed states such as Iran and Syria, which were threat risks for Kuwait, to get involved in the Iraqi problem. During the meetings that Kuwait and Saudi Arabia took part in, although official positions favoring the territorial integrity of Iraq were expressed, the clash of interests among the attendants was remarkable. For example, for some Kuwaiti and Arabs, the name Iraq is itself a serious threat to their states. There is strong support for both Saddam's execution and US occupation (Pollock, 2007: 25-26). In the Neighboring States Meeting held on the 22nd of April 2008, the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki wanted the neighboring states to act more proactively in developing relations with his administration, cancelling past debts and preventing militants from seizing the country. As is well known, all three demands were direct criticisms of the Iraqi policies of the Gulf States led by Saudi Arabia.

For the future of Iraq, Kuwait's main goal is to keep Iraq from becoming a threat. In this context, plans that envision the division of Iraq into three states have been suggested. Iraq's renewed and sustained political unity is a critical threat for Kuwait. It is foreseen that Iraq, which sustained its political unity under the leadership of both Shia and Sunni groups, poses a risk for Kuwait's government and its territorial unity. According to Abdullah Yaccoub Bishara, definition of the primary threat is quite clear for Kuwait. Bishara presented their so-called threat risks as Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism. He also pointed out that Iraqis never stopped supporting radicalism throughout history, and that they would maintain fundamentalist policies if possible. As for Bishara, Iraq has claimed territorial rights to Kuwait since it was founded. "However; radicalism is terrible, and we Arabs have suffered so much from this. Therefore, due to these historical facts, we Kuwaitis do not fancy a central government in Iraq. We see Kurdish autonomy as important because significant obstruction of the establishment of a central government is the express purpose of the Kurds. In this respect, we want to help the Kurds play an active role in Iraqi politics. On the other hand, if we

compare, the Shiites or Shiite federal structure poses a lower security risk for us than the Sunni threat. At this point, the effect of Iran on Iraq gains importance. A Shiite Iraqi government which is under the influence of Iran would threaten us". Being closely acquainted with Turkey and having negotiated frequently with Özal concerning the realization of the Peace Water Project, Bishara suggested that they supported the division of Iraq into the Federal regions, and that the Kurds play an active role in the federal structure in Baghdad, and that the Iraq issue is the main concern of Kuwait's foreign policy. [1]

Dr. Haila Al-Mekaimi, She is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Kuwait University, argued that Iraq's instability is a threat which should be considered along with Iran's expansionism, and that there are three main threat associated with Iraq. Dr. Mekaimi described the threats as:

1-Radical Islamism
2-Tribalism
3-Sectarianism

Dr. Mekaimi claimed that fundamentalist religious trends are supported by states of the region. For Dr. Mekaimi, radicalism may shortly attain dimensions that pose a threat to all the states in the region. On this subject, Dr. Mekaimi sees the roles of the Arab-Israel issue and American policies as the political basis for radical trends. On the other hand, stating that tribalism and sectarian conflict in Iraq directly affects Kuwait, Mekaimi claims that politicizing the Shiites leads to instability across the Gulf and, at the same time, to Iran's increasing power in the region. Dr. Mekaimi points out that the central Iraqi government will be of value to Iran, and in a short time Iraq will become a country under the control of Iran. According to Mekaimi, in order to maintain good relations with the government, the ideal solution to the Iraqi problem is the division of the country into the federal states. Unlike Turkey, which claims that problems between federal states will weaken Iraq and complicate the setting of a common foreign policy, Mekaimi says that an Iraq which concentrates on its domestic problems will stop being a threat to the states in its vicinity.[2]

Although Kuwait formally supports Iraq's unity, the head of the *Center for Strategic and Future Studies*, Dr. Yusuf Gh. Ail, claims that two different policies on Iraq (formal and de facto) are in effect. According to Dr. Ali, formal policy is to preserve Iraq's political and

territorial integrity. Furthermore, the chief of Kuwait's National Security Service, Sheik Ahmed al-Fahd al-Sabah said that Kuwait's formal policy is opposed to the division of Iraq, and its civil and sectarian war (Pollock, 2007: 26). On the other side, pointing out that Sunnis do not see Kuwait as an independent state, Dr Ali claims that Kuwait would not make efforts to support the unity of the Shiites and Sunnis. For Dr. Ali, "In spite of our formal support for Iraq's unity, we are opposed to the establishment of a central state in Iraq, in fact. Kuwait's interests require continued conflict among the factions and a weak central government of Iraq." [3]

Another difference between Turkish and Kuwaiti Iraq policies regards the role of the Kurdish Federal Region and the Kurds in Iraq's political life (Altunışık, 2007: 69-88). At first Turkey explicitly supported the regional government structure in Iraq and didn't have any relations with the Kurdish Federal Region until 2009. For many years, Turkey did not send an invitation to Jalal Talabani, though he was the president of Iraq for some time, and it was uncomfortable with many policies of the head of the Kurdish Federal Government, Barzani, particularly concerning Kirkuk, in the press and formally. But Turkey pursued different policies on the use of oil reserves. Although Turkey advocates the control of the oil reserves and revenues by the central government, she kept silent when Turkish firms prospected in Kurdish regions. On the other side, Kuwait established a direct diplomatic and political relationship with the Kurdish Government, in particular, with Massoud Barzani. Visiting Kuwait a few months after Iraq's occupation, Barzani went to Kuwait as an official guest of the Kuwaiti government on the 13th of May 2006. It is remarkable that Barzani was welcomed as the "president of the Kurdistan Federation" (Haber7 Online, 2009). As part of his visit, Barzani met with lots of senior politicians besides the Prime Minister and the head of parliament. During his visit in February 2008, Barzani negotiated with the Kuwaiti Emir, Sabah al-Ahmed al-Cabir al-Sabah, Crown Prince Nawaf al-Ahmed al-Cabir al-Sabah, the Prime Minister, the Defense Minister and many businessmen. As a part of a two day visit by official invitation of the Emir, Barzani's top level welcome represents the continuity of the Kurdish policy of Kuwait's government. Moreover, the relationship between two parties is proceeding in 2009, and during his February 2009 visit, Barzani was again welcomed warmly and meetings were held. Barzani's welcome by the first deputy of Kuwait's Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister Sheik Cabir El Mubarak El Hamad El Sabah represents the importance of the visit. During Barzani's visit on February 2008, the subject of the Kurds' founding an independent state and distribution of Kirkuk and oil reserves was on the agenda.

In an interview with the press, Barzani stated that the federal system is will benefit Iraqis, and that the Kurds would tolerate no breach of the constitutional order or federal system. Beyond this, he implied that a variety of decisions could be made on the future of Kurds. According to Barzani, they are opposed to the central government understanding of the use of oil reserves. He claimed that Baghdad fancied pursuing different policies by ignoring the constitution. Besides, the Kurds are entitled to use the oil resources of their region, he claimed (Al-Khaled, 2009). Unlike Turkey's official position, Kuwait may be considered to support Kurdish oil policies. Namely, to counterbalance the aggressive policies of the Sunnis and Shiites, for Kuwait's security, Kurds need to be powerful on economy, policy and military issues.

But after the 2009 Turkey has changed their foreign policy regarding to Kurdish leadership and established a direct diplomatic and political relationship with Mussel and Kirkuk . First of all Turkey extended its relationship to Iraqi Kurds when Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu met with top Kurdish officials in a landmark visit to Kurdish region. During the visit Prof. Davutoğlu had a joint press conference with Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani. In the conference, he told "It is time for Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis to rebuild the Middle East. Therefore, it is time for everyone to take brave steps," on October 30, 2009 (Asbarez News, 2009). For 6 years after The Kurdistan Regional Government currently has been a constitutionally recognized authority, by many countries in the world though Turkey did not formally recognize the Government. Turkey has also taken profound steps to improve diplomatic relations with Kurdish Government following a visit by Davutoğlu. During his visit, Davutoğlu stated his hope that Turkey would soon open up a consulate in Erbil. By December 2009, Turkish government has initiated step and Turkish site informed the Iraqi and Kurdish government to open the consulate. After Iraqi Cabinet has approved opening a consulate in Erbil, Turkey open a Consulate Office in Erbil in March. Turkish Consul in Erbil Aydın Selcen stated that "opening the Turkish consulate in Kurdistan Region was grounded in a strategic vision rather than a tactical step and the key objective of the office is strong bilateral economic relations" (Rudaw News, 2010).

Although Turkey opened a Consulate in Erbil it didn't mean Turkish side change its policy towards Kuridish Government. Therefore Davutoğlu stressed that opening consulate in Erbil doesn't mean to recognize Kurdish Government as independent political entity. Following the proclamation the second Turkish consulate was opened in Basra and the third

in Iraq. The object of Turkish foreign policy regarding to Iraq is to develop relationship with whole Iraqi groups (Oktav, 2010: 53-74). So we can say that open a consulate in Erbil doesn't mean that radical change in Turkish policy in respect of relation with the Kurdish side. In this context, Turkey and Kuwait have a different relation with Kurdish government.

Regarding Kirkuk question, it is said that Kuwait has different strategies from Turkey's policies. During his contacts in 2008, Barzani brought up the Kirkuk issue again, and after he said that it was up to Iraqis to decide the Kirkuk issues, he argued that neighboring states had provoked the issue. During Iraq's reconstruction process, Barzani stated that Kuwait did not pursue a negative policy, but that it increased the instability of other states. Barzani's reckless discourse and so-called thesis on Kuwait, and Kuwait's efforts to develop relations with Barzani must be seen as a problematic area for Turkish-Kuwaiti relations.

Another area which caused conflict between Turkey and Kuwait is the position of Sunnis and Shiites in Iraqi political life. Although Kuwait is Sunni, and in 1980s, its government faced serious Shiite opposition, it deems Sunni radicalism a more serious threat. It examines radicalism on religious and nationalist sense and by this point of view it considers both Iraq and Saudi Arabia as threat risk. According to the former head of *Center of Strategic and Future Studies* Dr. Samdan Al Essa, there has been a critical radicalism threat in Kuwait. A connection was established between this security problem and the policies of Iraqi Sunni groups. Samdan implied that Kuwait didn't support Sunni groups. As for Samdan, although in the beginning, Kuwait's government supported Sunni groups in order for them to establish balance, they didn't unite and also they backed up radical groups' activities and in a short time they put themselves under the care of other states which delivered economic assistance. As Sunni groups followed unstable policies, Kuwait's government is not in favor of backing up them directly.[4] However, it is known that Turkey made great efforts towards leading Iraqi Sunni Groups' participation into the system. Regarding to this, bringing together the Sunni Arab party representatives and US Ambassador in Istanbul in December 2005. This meeting is regarded as a vital element of Sunni Arab participation in the political process (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010).

On the other side, Turkey and Kuwait follow different policies about Shiites. Kuwait's government, whose relation is on minimum level with Shiite Groups that obtained a strong

position in Iraq's central government, considers Dawa Party as focus destabilizing Kuwait and assassinating Amir. Kuwait's government, examining the relations of both Maliki and Jaaferi with Iran, sees Sadr's fundamentalist policies as a threat to itself. An interview which was held in *The Center for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies*, making researches on security problems in Gulf States, it was pointed out that the most important threat in terms of Kuwait was the Shiite Minority issues, arising from polarization of Shiites. There are many concerns about the Iran's efforts to become effective on the other states after Iraq. Aforesaid concern leads to the armament in the region and promotion of the powers such as USA to pursue more aggressive policies.[5] In terms of Turkey, Iran threat and the position of Iraqi Shiites are regarded among the primer threats. As a part of approach of the aforesaid Foreign ministry to the Iraq problem and Sadr's being hosted at top level during his Turkey visit shows that Turkey may compromise with Shiite groups. A Turkish company has undertaken the restoration of Askeriye Tomb which is sacred to Shiites. This tomb has suffered two terrorist attacks in 2006 and 2007 (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010). The head of Iraq's Islamic Supreme Council Ammar Abdulaziz Al-Hakim, together with his board, has visited Turkey in November. Al-Hakim has met Turkish President Abdullah Gül, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu. However, Kuwait shows Shiite Parties as the groups under Iran's effect which tries to strengthen the central government in Iraq.

On the other side, Turkish-Iranian relations and Turkey's outlook to the Iran's nuclear programs are different. Iran's nuclear program has aroused serious concerns in Kuwait. About a million drugs were bought for nuclear leakage, and supervision systems for development of the nuclear program and determination of the leakage in advance were set along the borders. At the same time, it supports the efforts of USA and Israel to put an end to Iran's nuclear programs .In terms of Kuwait, Iran's being a nuclear power means Gulf states passing into the control of Iran. As for Kuwait, the sole power to stop the effect of the Iran is USA. According to Dr. Abraham Al Hadban from Kuwait University, "Gulf states doesn't want to think USA's withdrawal from the region and Iraq, because Iran's effect and its expansionist aims is only stopped by only the presence of USA soldiers. Namely, only USA can police Gulf states against Iran threat. Tell openly, Iran is the threat source of all Gulf states and Kuwait. In Kuwait, general opinion holds that Israel is better than Iran. Therefore, we don't support developing policies which makes us being opposite to Israel about Palestinian issue, because Israel would be an important ally in terms of both military balance in Middle East and Iran

threat."[6] Israel's being an effective power in Middle East and Iraq hasn't bothered Kuwait. Kuwait assumes that Israel will play a great role in stopping expansionist policies of Iran. According to one of the Kuwaiti experts from the *Center for Strategic Studies and Research,* Dr. Suleiman Abdullah, "Israel is a country which can determine whether another country in the region will be powerful or not. Israel's political and military force is regarded as a threat by Iran, which wants to be effective in the Gulf. To preserve our existence, it is important for us to improve our relations with Israel.[7] On the other hand, while Turkey tries to strengthen her economic and political cooperation with Iran, especially in energy field, its policy regarding Iran's nuclear program is different. In November 2008, at the Brooking Institute, when asked about Iran's nuclear program, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan responded, "Those who want to prevent nuclear weapon production shouldn't own nuclear weapons" and he criticized Israeli and US policies (Radikal News, 2008). In terms of Iraq, Turkey is disturbed by Israel's operations in the region and this disturbance is openly discussed from time to time. Turkey does not hesitate to criticize Israeli policies regarding the Palestinian issue.

Another area of conflict between the Iraq policies of Turkey and Kuwait is their positions on the future presence of American soldiers in Iraq. Although neither them favor withdrawal of American troops before Iraq becomes established and they support American operation from different angles, their policies about the future status of the soldiers in Iraq are different. The leading difference has arisen due to Kuwait's opposes to the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq in near future and due to its support for America's policies about building a military base in Kurdish region. Also Kuwait supports the continuation of the deployment of US soldiers to intervene in Iraqi issues, and for this purpose it favors the building a US military base in Kurdish region. Kuwait assumes that such bases could intervene in Iraq and Iran centered issues and at least play a deterrent role. Nevertheless, as indicated in the interviews, Kuwait minds uttering these policies loudly.

Cooperation between Turkey and Kuwait

While there are fields of conflicting interests between Turkey and Kuwait, there are also important areas of cooperation. As Dr. Yusuf Ali pointed out, until August 1990, there was a historical bias in Kuwait, and people had a negative attitude towards Turkey. According to Kuwaitis, the power that paved the way for Iraq's expansionist objectives was the Ottoman Empire of that period. The Ottoman authorities' initiatives restricting Sheikh Mubarak Al-

Sabah's autonomy are seen as the cause of today's invasions and wars. However, Dr. Ali indicates that the active foreign policy followed by Özal during the Iraq invasion changed this negative attitude towards Turkey. According to Ambassador Bishara, Özal is one of the most important leaders in the history of Kuwait. Bishara notes that after Özal, the Gül/Erdoğan pair will put the projects inherited from Özal into effect again and therefore, Turkish–Kuwaiti relations will improve more quickly. As for Dr. Ali, he indicates that since Turkey is a Sunni Islam power, it is considered important not only by the Gulf states, but also by Kuwait. Turkey's modern political system, social culture and its refusal to support radicalism in the Middle East not only inspires the people of the region, but also causes governments to change their attitude towards Turkey. According to Dr. Ali, the Persian Gulf states are looking for a role model, and it could be Turkey. The best response to Islamic Radicalism, which threatens the stability of governments, is the modern structure of Turkey. An important part of the states in the region, including Kuwait, see Turkey as a symbol and as a model nation. As a matter of fact, in the elections held on May 17, 2009, four female deputy candidates won elections, and this is an explicit sign of Kuwait's support for a project of social transformation. The last elections results restrict the radicals' participation in the government. Women's participation in political process will weaken the influence of Kuwaiti radical groups over its political system (Izzak, 2009). On the other hand, the fields of tourism and education offer opportunities for cooperation between Turkey and Kuwait to improve.

Dr. Mekaime also asserts that Turkish–Kuwaiti relations are strategic relations. According to Mekaime, August 1990 is a milestone in Turkish–Kuwaiti relations. Mekaime points to the fact that official visits increased and several treaties in security and economy fields were signed after the invasion, and goes on to say that since 1990, Turkey has openly supported the protection of Kuwait's sovereignty. Mekaime asserts that the strategic point of Turkish-Kuwaiti relations stem from both states' being opposed to Iran's being a dominant power in the Gulf, emphasizes that the initiatives towards changing the balance of power in the Gulf so that it favors Iran will necessarily influence Turkish policies, which is a neighboring country of Iran.[8] Thus, fundamental security problem of both states arises from Iran's expansionist policies. In fact, Kuwait's government, which had explicitly supported the Iraq invasion, was uncomfortable with the situation when Shiites came to dominate the post-invasion government. In Kuwait, whose Shiite population is 25%, the Shiite opposition posed a serious security problem in 1980s. The Kuwaiti government blamed the centralist Iraqi Shiite Dawa Party for the bombardments of the American and French Embassies in December

1980, and the failed assassination attempt on the Kuwaiti Emir in 1985. 17 party members were arrested for this assassination attempt. The fact that Ibrahim al-Jaafari, who became Prime Minister in Iraq in elections held after the US invasion and Nouri al-Maliki were affiliated with the Dawa Party negatively affected Kuwaiti relations with Iraq's central administration (Pollock, 2007: 22). In this framework, the Kuwaiti government tries to recruit Turkey to oppose the Shiite and Sunni threat from Iraq and Iran. Dr. İbrahim al-Hadban says of the threat assessments in question: "Iran will be a much greater threat in future. Kuwait and other Gulf Emirates are little states. The more the Iranian threat increases, the more the Gulf states will try to be allied with Turkey and to draw Turkey to their side. Turkey is a modern country, which does not want conflict and contributes to region's stability."[9]

It is obvious that Turkey won't be a mere spectator to Iranian initiatives seeking to alter the balance of power in the region in its favor. As a matter of fact, as Gözen pointed out in his work, to which we referred above, during Turkey's military operations on Iraq's border in 1991, another reason for Turkey's amassing of 120 thousand soldiers on the border was to prevent a similar Iranian initiative. Thus, it can be seen that there is a threat perception in both nations, even if Iran's expansionism is perceived from differing perspectives.

Dr. Suleiman Abdullah, who works for a research center called *The Centre for Research and Studies on Kuwait,* is among those who forcefully express the current anxieties. According to Abdullah, Egypt, which was a nice counterbalance to the Iran and Iraq threat, does not have the same power anymore. Although they are armed, the Saudis are far from being a power that can balance Iran. Thus, Turkey appears to be the country that can contribute to the security of Gulf states. In fact, as we have seen, it is incorrect to evaluate Turkey's relations with Gulf states since the 2003 Iraq invasion independently from these states' threat assessments regarding Iran (Aras, 2005: 89-97). Kuwait believes that in addition to Iran, Saudis policies can also lead to trouble for the Kuwaiti government. It is alleged that Saudi Arabia destabilizes Kuwait by supporting Sunni radicalism and tribalism in Kuwait, because in the 1922 Protocol, Saudi Arabia obtained two thirds of the land to which Kuwait claims territorial right, as Kuwait makes clear in many of their negotiations. Most of all, Kuwaitis support Turkey's presence in the Gulf as a third power.[10] The Kuwaiti government takes Turkey as an example of how to eliminate social support for radical Islamic groups. In this framework, strengthening and expanding cooperation between Turkey and Kuwait in the fields of culture and education should be supported by the government. The Emir's family's

buying a villa in Bodrum and an increasing number of tourists coming to Turkey from Kuwait are considered important by the Kuwaiti government.

Another threat to Kuwait is the spread of instability from Iran and Iraq to other states in the region. Kuwait foresees combating possible threats by international cooperation initiatives ,including those with Turkey. Some Kuwaiti intellectuals allege that USA gave the green light for Saddam's invasion of Kuwait. They assert that one cannot put all its faith in the US, and that a possible treaty between USA and Iran could mean abandoning the Gulf states to Iran's initiative. In this context, it was important for Kuwait to adopt the policy of strengthening its military alliances through NATO's 2004 Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. In the context of the Istanbul Initiative, cooperation in the fields of the struggle with terror, the prevention of the dissemination of mass destruction weapons', defense planning, and help with border security and military education and exercises is foreseen (Alani, 2005). According to Dr. Mohammed Al-Sayed Selim from Kuwait University, "It shouldn't be expected that Turkey, a NATO country, be the sole contributor to the security of the Gulf states. However, NATO's Istanbul Conference and the Istanbul initiative adopted during this conference are very important. Kuwait played a fundamental role in NATO's opening to the Arab Middle East. In fact, the Istanbul Initiative has more importance than people think. Kuwait's government is aware of this and holds the Initiative in high regard."[11] As a matter of fact, Kuwait was the first Gulf country to participate in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. After Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates participated in the Istanbul Initiative. At the same time, Kuwait became the host country of NATO's Public Diplomacy Conference held in December 2006. During NATO Deputy Secretary General Claudio Bisogniero's Kuwait visit on the 27th of January 2009, these parties confirmed their plans to strengthening the relationships outlined in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (Bisogniero, 2009).

Consequently, the developments in question quickly and effectively helped to improve the military cooperation process between Turkey and Kuwait. A memorandum of understanding on military cooperation was signed between Kuwait's chief of defense, Lieutenant General Fahd Al-Ameer, who paid an official visit to Turkey during the ninth International Defense Industry Fair, and Turkey's Chief of General Staff, General İlker Başbuğ. The Turkish General Staff specified that, "In the memorandum framework, military relations, particularly cooperation and defense industry, will be promoted and diversified"

(Official Web Page of Turkish General Staff, 2009). 13 different treaties were signed by Turkey and Kuwait in 1998. Among these, there are military cooperation and common military programs (Asia News, 2009). Thus, it is foreseen that in the following years, both in NATO and in the framework of bilateral relations, Turkish–Kuwaiti military cooperation initiatives and common policies will continue to strengthen.

One of the new fields of cooperation between Kuwait and Turkey is the policy of restricting Iran's influence over Iraq. Kuwait tries to overcome its security problems arising from Iraq by strengthening its cooperation with Kurdish groups and by slowing the US troops withdrawal from Iraq by putting military bases from there. As for Turkey, since its Iraq policy is conditioned by its Kurd and Turkmen policies, it could not appease the Gulf states by eliminating their anxieties. In recent years, although low-intensity contacts, particularly with Kurdish groups, signaled changes in some policies, this does not contain a message that Iranian influence will be limited. Furthermore, cooperation efforts, which have yet to be announced to the public, preoccupy the states in the region. In the meantime, as Dr. Selim said, the states in the region know that Turkey, as a NATO member, has a limited ability to deal with Iran. According to Bishara, who emphasized good relations with Turkey, the fact that a minimal change in the Gulf is contrary to Turkey's and Kuwait's interests, points out that Turkish-Kuwaiti relations should make progress in the strategic dimension. This can best be summarized using Bishara's list of the fields of cooperation between Turkey and Kuwait:

1- Both Baath and Iran radicalism are threats to Kuwait. We want the promotion of Turkish–Syrian relations to help rid Syria of Baathist ideology and Iranian influence. Thus, we give full support to Turkey's intermediary role between Syria and Israel. We can strengthen our cooperation in this field.

2- We support Turkey's good relations with Iran. In order to persuade Iran by diplomatic means, we could use Turkey's support. Turkey can help us eliminate Iran's expansionist policies in both the fields of both diplomacy and security.

3- We support Shiite and Sunni cooperation, and the prevention of sectarian war, provided that the position of Kurdish people does not regress. It is good to establish more dialogue in this respect. Iraq's stabilization is at the head of the areas where cooperation is possible, and in addition to this, the structure of Iraq's administration should not permit foreign policies that threaten its neighbors.

4- I think that it is useful to cooperate with Turkey in order to bring radical groups, Al-Qaida and other such movements, under control. There have been people who went to Iraq or Kuwait in order to fight against the US. These began to cause problems when they returned to Kuwait. We should improve our mutual cooperation against terrorism."

Conclusion

Since the 2003 Iraq invasion, conflicting interests and new opportunities for cooperation have arisen. How relations between the two parties will improve will be clarified by the ongoing developments and the attitudes of their political actors. In the meantime, regional and international system will try to influence the process whether we want it to do so or not. The USA, Iran, Saudi Arabia and, to some extent, Israel, all have the potential to affect Turkish-Kuwaiti relations. Since Kuwait's security arrangement with the US is based on concerns for its own survival, American policies gain importance. In other words, it is difficult to improve relations with Kuwait because of the US. All the same, the US's attitude before its 1990 invasion creates some doubts in this regard. A certain part of Kuwaitis think that the US exploited them in order to eliminate Saddam. Similar concerns are prevalent in American–Turkish relations. Kuwait asserts that a possible American–Iranian bargain will negatively affect the security and political sovereignty of the Gulf states. In this context, Kuwait seeks shelter under the protective umbrella of NATO. In conclusion, it is good to emphasize that Kuwait deeply desires cooperation with Turkey because of the Shiite threat from Iran, its lack of confidence in American policies and the government problems caused by Sunni radicalism.

On the other hand, Turkey foreign policy prioritizes protection of territorial integrity and national unity of Iraq. Turkey's privilege is to form network of communication with all the political groups and community leaders in Iraq. However, Kuwait has official relationship with Kurdish leaders and enjoys developing relationship with them in political and diplomatically context. On the other hand, the Kirkuk is another major issue between Turkey and Kuwait. The final status of Kirkuk and Turkmen issues are major concern for Turkey. Although Kirkuk question is not as much important for Kuwait as Turkey Basra and Shai dominance in Basra is a major concern for Kuwait in its foreign policy.

END NOTES

*Assistant Professor, Abant Izzet Baysal University, Department of International Relations, Bolu, Turkey.

[1] Interview with Abdullah Y. Bishara, Kuwait. 23.03.2009.

[2] Interview with Haila Al Mekaimi,Kuwait, 22. 03.2009.

[3] Interview with Yusuf Gh. Ali, Kuwait, 22.03.2009

[4] Interview with Shamdan Y. Al Essa,Kuwait, 19.03.2009

[5] Interviews, *The Center for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies,* Kuwait, 22.03.2009.

[6] Interview with İbrahim Al Hadban, Kuwait, 22.03.2009

[7] Interview with Sülayman Abdullah, Kuwait, 23.03.2009

[8] Interview, loc. cit.

[9] Interview, loc. cit.

[10] Interview, loc. cit.

[11] Interview with Mohammad el Sayed Selim, Kuwait, 23.03.2009

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