



Turkey–Iran relations, 1997 to 2000: the Kurdish and Islamist questions

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ABSTRACT This article focuses on the bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran from 1997 to 10 June 2000, terminating with the ECO conference held in Tehran. The omni-balancing international relations theory of Steven David is used to explain Turkey's relations with Iran. Six major developments which are influenced by the Kurdish and Islamist questions are used to emphasise significant aspects of the two countries' relations: 1) the 'Tale of the Two Mayors', which refers to how the cases of the Mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the Mayor of Tehran, Golam Hossein Karbaschi, were covered in the press; 2) the Kavakçı affair, which refers to the issue of Merve Kavakçı, the female member of the Turkish parliament who raised a political firestorm by wearing a headscarf (türban) into the Turkish parliament building in April 1999; 3) the July 'student' demonstrations in Iran, particularly in Tehran; 4) the Turkish bombing raid of 17 July 1999; 5) the Hizbullah affair in Turkey; and 6) the arrest of the killers in May 2000, with alleged ties to Iran, of prominent Turks. I suggest that none of the above had a stormy impact on the wider geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic interests of the two countries, especially in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Iraq and the eastern Mediterranean. I confirm that the omni-balancing international relations theory is an adequate model to explain the bilateral relations between the two countries.

In this article I consider six major developments regarding the Kurdish and Islamist challenges in Turkey–Iran relations as they appeared in the Istanbul and Tehran press during 1997 to 1 July 2000, with the intention of demonstrating the role they played in defining the geopolitic and geostrategic parameters of the two countries' relations with special reference to the Kurdish and Islamist questions.¹ The first is what I call the 'Tale of the Two Mayors', which refers to how the cases of the Mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the Mayor of Tehran, Golam Hossein Karbaschi, were covered. The second is the Kavakçı affair, which refers to the issue of Merve Kavakçı, the female member of the Turkish parliament who raised a political firestorm by wearing a headscarf (türban) into the Turkish parliamentary building in April 1999. The third concerns the July 1999 'student' demonstrations in Iran, particularly Tehran. Fourth is the Turkish bombing raid of 17 July 1999, fifth, the Hizbullah affair in Turkey and sixth, the arrest of the killers, with alleged ties to Iran, of Uğur Mumcu, Ahmet Kışıla Taner, Muammer Aksoy and Bahriye Üçok, among others

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in May 2000. In spite of the considerable domestic impact of these ‘happenings’, I suggest that none of them strongly affected the wider geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic concerns of the two states in the Middle East, the Caucasus, Central Asia or the eastern Mediterranean. I proffer this conclusion within the context of omni-balancing international relations theory which I argue, offers the best explanation of each country’s foreign policy, especially as far as the trans-state and transnational Kurdish and Islamist questions are concerned. Omni-balancing emphasises that, where external threats are significant and internal ones manageable, priorities tilt towards the external threat. Omni-balancing suggests that, when internal threats are more significant and external ones less threatening, priorities determining foreign policy tend towards coping with domestic politics. The threat of Kurdish nationalism throughout the 1980s and 1990s represented the greatest threat to the Turkish government; the threat continued into 2000. But, unlike the posits of omni-balancing theory, Kurdish nationalism was not just a challenge to the Turkish government and/or regime, but to the state itself and to the Turkish-based ethnic nationalism that legitimised it.

Omni-balancing is also adequate for explaining partially Iran’s foreign policy, ie in regimes in which external factors are significant and internal ones manageable, priorities shaping foreign policy tilt towards accommodating the external ones. Iran’s foreign policy after 1983 was dominated by external forces, most notably, the efforts of the USA to curtail and perhaps topple the regime. However, I argue in this study that ‘internal threats’ had become dominant by the mid-1990s. The internal threats consisted not just of a different ‘brand’ of Islam, as represented by the struggle between the reformists and conservatives but, as the July 1999 ‘student’ demonstrations suggested, there were strong possibilities of secular and non-clerical forces also aligning with the demonstrators, including Kurdish nationalists. These latter examples are illustrations of internal threats seeking precedence over external threats, ie the USA most predominantly, but also Turkey, especially through its large incursions into northern Iraq, particularly after 1991, which threatened Iran’s geopolitical and geostrategic space in northern Iraq.²

The tale of the two mayors

The case of two prominent mayors each governing the largest city in their respective countries and their sentencing to imprisonment in 1998 is illustrative of the Islamist question and the role that it plays in relations between Turkey and Iran. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi were the respective mayors of Istanbul and Tehran in 1998. Erdoğan had been in office since 1994 and Karbaschi since 1991.

Karbaschi was detained in April 1998 and on 25 July he was convicted on charges of bribery, embezzlement and fraud. After sentencing his case went to appeal, but his appeals were rejected. In early 1998 he was jailed, albeit in well furnished surroundings and with telephone and other communication outlets to the outside. Erdoğan was convicted and sentenced to a 10-month jail term in November 1998 which, again after appeal, he started to serve in February 1999.

He was released from jail in July after serving four months of his sentence. Erdoğan was imprisoned for making a speech in the southeastern city of Siirt, a city that is heavily populated by Kurd and Arab ethnic groups, in which he said 'minarets are our bayonets, domes are our helmets, mosques are our barracks, believers are our soldiers (minareler süngümüz, kübbeler miğferimiz, camiler kışlarımız, müminler askerlerimiz)'³ Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) commanders denounced Erdoğan's speech as inciting Islamic reactionism (*irticacılık*) movements in Turkey. It must be noted here that the Turkish work '*irticacılık*' denotes not just Islamic fundamentalism, but rather 'traditionalism' and/or 'backwardness', thus it could denote the traditional dress that Kurds sometime wear. The State Security Court agreed; the mayor was tried and convicted of inciting sedition against the state. Like Karbaschi, he too was allowed to appeal his case as both the Ankara and Tehran regimes were eager to show the world media that their states were committed to legal due process. Erdoğan was compelled to resign from the Virtue Party (VP), the reincarnation of the Welfare (Refah) Party which the State Constitution Court had banned on 16 January 1998, and from his mayoralship on 6 November 1998.

Erdoğan was one of the main and youngest (he was 43 years old when imprisoned) leaders of the WP and was a contender for leadership of the new VP. He was in line to replace Necmettin Erbakan, the former head of the WP, who himself was barred from holding political office. Indeed, the differences between Erdoğan and Erbakan seem to have played a role in the lack of rumpus created by the VP and its new leader, Recai Kutan, regarding Erdoğan's sentencing to jail. Kutan was of the generation of Erbakan and desirous of maintaining more of the traditional religious motifs in the party's rhetoric; both, however, wanted to make the VP more acceptable to the TAF. In May 2000 Kutan managed to retain the party leadership of the VP in a close election with Abdullah Gül, a leader of the reformist (*yenicilik*) branch of the VP of which Erdoğan, banned from holding political office, was considered to be the *eminence grise*. In spite of the fact that the VP was becoming much more of a mainstream party under the leadership of Kutan, if it were to be led by a charismatic and astute politician like Erdoğan, or even Gül, it would have represented more of a challenge than either the Kemalist elite or the TAF were prepared to tolerate.⁴

Erdoğan received little of the support from Iranian officials or from the Iranian media that Erbakan had received before and after his selection as prime minister in June 1996. No doubt part of the reason for this was Tehran's perception that a prime minister or potential prime minister can influence policies much more than the mayor of a city, even if it was the largest city in Turkey. There was also a difference between the press that supported Khatami and the press that opposed him. In principle, one would have thought that the reformist press in Iran would have favoured the domestic Islamist policies advocated by Erbakan, but Khatami and his supporters, as we have seen above, also very much wanted better relations with the hard-line, conservative, secularist and anti-Islamist government led by Mesut Yılmaz and the right-wing nationalist president, Süleyman Demirel. In addition, Iran had just agreed in a number of security protocols not to interfere in Turkey's domestic politics. Accusations by Turkey that it had done so had led to the expulsion of two of Iran's ambassadors in a

period of eight years, one in 1989 and the other in 1997.⁵ Erdoğan did receive sympathetic treatment from some Islamist media in Iran, but by and large the coverage was shallow and without conviction. It seemed the tumultuous domestic politics of both countries did not allow space for much coverage of officials who were probably considered minor political figures as far as foreign policy matters were concerned, in spite of their great significance in domestic politics, especially the fact that both Erdoğan's and Karbaschi's policies could be considered to represent democratisation forces within their respective polities.

The Turkish press paid scant attention to the case of Karbaschi, who was under attack from hard-line clerics as a close advisor to President Khatami and who had played an important role as a campaign strategist in his resounding election victory in April 1997. While many of the charges brought against Karbaschi were of political intent, there seems to be truth in the charge that he did utilise funds at his disposal to further the election prospects of Khatami which, ironically, because of the large margin of his victory (Khatami received 70% of the vote) he would not have needed. But Karbaschi supported the reformist policies inaugurated by Khatami after he became president in August 1997. It was easier for the opponents of Khatami to go after the mayor than the president. Khatami in particular favoured fewer restrictions on women's attire, the wearing of the *chador* (a black cloth that covers a woman from head to toe with only her face exposed), more freedom in the media and in film among other things. The right of women not to wear the *chador* was one of the demands of some of the supporters of Khatami. Ironically, the right to wear Islamist attire, in this case the *türban* was one of the rights that Erdoğan's Islamist women followers were demanding. Of course, there is a difference in the amount of a woman's body that a *chador* or a *türban* covers. Unlike the *chador*, described above, the *türban* is largely a head covering that covers the neck and shoulders. Another head covering Turkish women wear is the *çarşaf* which, like the *türban*, covers the head, neck and shoulders, but is not as tightly bound as the *türban*.

By the summer of 1998 the right to wear or not to wear a headscarf was one of the major symbols of the struggle between Islamist and secular forces in Turkey and a symbol of the struggle for power between contending political forces.⁶ One would have thought that the anti-Khatami and Karbaschi forces would have applauded and given vigorous support to Erdoğan and his followers, some of whom wanted to implement the *shariah* as the obtaining body of civil law in the country. Likewise, one would have thought that some of the hard-line secular Kemalists in Turkey would have lent more support to Karbaschi, who could have been depicted as someone fighting against the implementation of many 'Islamic' restrictions imposed by the '*Mollarsı*', as the Kemalists liked to call the ruling regime in Iran, Khatami included, ie as someone who wanted to make Iran at least a bit more secular. Although, as far as I know, he never called for women to take off the *chador*. Karbaschi, who could be portrayed as opposing the Islamic conservative establishment in Iran, received no support from the nationalist, Kemalist, anti-Islamist press in Turkey and little support from the Islamist press either. It is not surprising that, when Karbaschi was released from prison on 25 January 2000 as a result of a pardon by Supreme

Guide Ali Khamenehi, his release received almost no coverage in the Turkish press, despite the import that his release would have on the Iranian parliamentary elections scheduled for 26 February, in which Karbaschi played an active role.⁷ Karbaschi's release and his potential role in the scheduled elections sharpened the discussion as to what role Islam should play in politics and society; the very question that was paralysing Turkey.⁸ The policies pursued by Iran *vis-à-vis* domestic politics in Turkey before the affair of Sincan and, in the case of Turkey, the harsh criticism of the Islamic republic by leading Turkish officials and by the right-wing nationalist media during the one-year administration of Erbakan, softened somewhat after his ouster on 18 June 1997. Ankara, too, was waiting to see what the policies of the new reformist government of Mohammad Khatami would be. Neither government seemed to be very interested in the fate of the mayors of each's largest city.

The reason for this policy of officially expressed non-interference in their mutual domestic politics had several bases. Each government deemed the case of the mayors to be critical and potentially determinative of future political developments. The continued political success either of the mayors and the politics they favoured was perceived by the ruling elites, in the case of Iran the hard-line conservatives, as jeopardising their hold on political power and political office. In the case of Karbaschi the chief opposition came from the clerics and their supporters, who opposed Khatami's reformist policies. Karbaschi represented the power struggle between the two groups. This struggle continued to dominate Iran's domestic politics throughout 1999 and 2000. Subsequently, the two factions' struggle became particularly evident during large 'student' demonstrations in early July 1999. These demonstrations and their import for Turkish-Iranian relations will be discussed below. Second, neither Ankara nor Tehran wanted their volatile domestic politics to influence security, trade and gas and oil pipeline negotiations. The above developments also emphasised that both countries sought to solve their differences with regard to the Kurdish question in northern Iraq and not within either of their own country's borders.⁹ However, after the expulsion of Abdullah Öcalan from Syria in October 1998, his capture in February 1999 and his subsequent sentencing to death on 29 June, it became clear that Turkey would increasingly target Iran's support of 'terrorists' and its granting of shelter to the PKK in Iran. By July 1999 these developments came to pass.

The Kavakçı affair

The next explosion in Turkey-Iran relations occurred in May 1998 over what became known as the 'Kavakçı affair', which was intimately tied to the 'headscarf' issue in Turkey. The Kavakçı affair occurred as Turkey was preparing its legal case against Abdullah Öcalan, the now jailed leader of the PKK, and continued into June while Öcalan was being tried. Merve Kavakçı is a young Islamist woman who was elected to parliament as a member of the VT in April 1999 and who vowed to wear a *türban* to the swearing-in ceremony for MPs. She was roundly booed and exposed to a good deal of verbal abuse upon entering the parliament chamber and compelled to withdraw. The 'affair' raged for several

weeks. The issue subsided somewhat in June when it was revealed that Kavakçı also held American citizenship. She had been born in the USA where her father was the director of an Islamic society in Houston, Texas. Kavakçı's dual citizenship disbarred her from being a member of parliament, as Turkish MPs are not allowed double citizenship. Kavakçı's supporters quickly pointed out that it was the right to hold double citizenship that the Turkish government was demanding of Germany for Turks living in and who had been born in Germany. But the Turkish government waved this analogy aside. On 20 September 1999 Turkey's highest administrative court stripped Kavakçı of her Turkish citizenship because of her dual American citizenship. Since she was no longer a Turkish citizen she could not take her seat in parliament. What most of the media, both Turkish and Western, did not report was the belief held in some circles in Turkey that the Turkish government 'sees' men behind the headscarf and that the faces of these men are Kurdish. The almost simultaneous occurrence of both Öcalan's trial and the 'headscarf' issue emphasised how closely connected both 'problems' are. Both had to be crushed and preferably at the same time. In an attempt to gain Turkish citizenship, a few months later Kavakçı married Bekir Yıldırım, a successful businessman, but she was unable to reclaim her parliamentary seat. In further humiliation, the press referred to her marriage as *hülle*, an Islamic term referring to an interim marriage necessary before a divorced couple can remarry. The press also cast doubt on whether Kavakçı was a 'true' Islamist as at her marriage ceremony she wore a pert blue stylish hat atop her *türban*.

The Kavakçı affair created a brouhaha between Turkey and Iran. Bülent Ecevit, now the new Turkish Prime Minister, once again went on the attack against Iran. He accused Iran of 'continuing its efforts to export its revolution and of supporting the PKK', in spite of the recent border security agreements.¹⁰ Iran, charged the new prime minister, was taking over Syria's role as the main supporter of the PKK. He noted Iran hosted the 6th annual congress of the PKK. The two countries' TV and radio media engaged in a war of bombast for the next two weeks. Kemal Kharrazi, the Iranian foreign minister, stated bluntly that 'Iran did not like Turkey's secular policies'. He added that 'respecting peoples' values and beliefs was required to establish democracy'.¹¹ On 8–9 May hundreds of Iranian students, most likely prompted by Iranian officials, demonstrated for the right of Turkish women to wear the *türban* and other Islamic attire. These demonstrations were somewhat ironic, for in under two months Iranian youth would be demonstrating for the right to throw off the *chador*. Faziye Rafsanjani, the daughter of former President Hashemi Rafsanjani and a member of parliament, wrote a letter in support of Kavakçı. Upon receiving Rafsanjani's letter, Kavakçı replied that she wanted 'no support from a country such as Iran where there is no freedom'.¹² In many ways Kavakçı and Rafsanjani represented the dilemma of the democratising forces in Turkey and Iran. Both were Islamist women, one, Rafsanjani, supporting the reformist movement in Iran and the other, Kavakçı, supporting the Islamist reformist movement in Turkey. The conservative Islamists were anti-Khatami's reforms and the Kemalist secularist students anti-Kavakçı. The dilemma of both women was that they did not support each other or the democratising forces they represented; neither did their

respective governments want the two women's dilemmas to affect their wider foreign policies.

Amid the Kavakçı affair, Ankara did not forget the PKK. The TAF announced that Osman Öcalan, the brother of Abdullah, had been given sanctuary in Iran, along with several other PKK commanders. The Turkish media showed several PKK guerrillas confessing that they had been trained in Iran. On 22 May it was the Iranian press's turn. Iranian media claimed that Turkish border soldiers had killed nine Iranians out of a group of 45 who had been trying to cross into Turkey and dumped their bodies next to a border fence. Necmettin Kalkan, Deputy Governor of eastern Van province, stated that the border crossers had unfortunately walked into the middle of a TAF sweep against the PKK. Amid the ongoing Kavakçı affair, both countries seemed determined to implement their recent border security agreements and let their respective military authorities sort out the border killings.

The Turkish generals obviously wanted to take advantage of Iran's support of Kavakçı to ratchet up demands that Tehran abandon support for the PKK along the lines they had used against Syria the previous October. The generals did this knowing that much of Iran's support for Kavakçı was an effort to strengthen its own failing Islamist legitimacy—a failure increasing realised by both the anti- and pro-Khatami forces. But for Turkey the number one problem was still the PKK.

Turkey alleged that, despite the recent border security agreements, Iran was unwilling to give up the PKK card: a card that Iran obviously felt it needed in order to increase its position *vis-à-vis* Turkey in northern Iraq. There seems to be credence in Turkey's charges that Iran did increase its support for the PKK after Öcalan's expulsion from Syria, that it allowed the PKK to hold its 6th Annual Congress in Urmiya in February 1999 and that Iran intelligence co-operated with the PKK in recruiting local Kurds to carry out terrorist attacks against targets within Turkey. Öcalan's admission from prison, whether compelled or not, that Iran supplied the PKK with weapons and allowed weapons to be transferred via Armenia and Russia, and that Tehran pressed Jalal Talabani to allow his territory to be used by the PKK to stage raids into northern Iraq, increased Turkey's ire. The latter activity threatened Turkey's KDP ally. In many ways the Kavakçı affair was enmeshed firmly in the larger geopolitical tug-of-war between the two countries concerning the geopolitical role that each wanted to play or hoped to play in northern Iraq.

Ratcheting up to conflict?

Iran's allegations that Turkish fighter aircraft bombed several sites in Iranian territory dominated relations between the two countries all through July 1999. On 18 July Iran reported that Turkey had bombed sites in Iran in which five people were killed. The bombing raid occurred a little over a week after Iran witnessed the largest anti-government demonstrations since the Islamic revolution in 1979. Once again the Kurdish question was tied to domestic political legitimacy. The demonstrations commencing on 8 July were, at first, largely comprised of students. Demonstrators gathered at first in numbers of 200 to 300,

but in the next two days the number rose to 10 000 and subsequently crowds of up to 100 000 were reported.¹³ The demonstrators demanded more freedom of expression, of assembly and of attire. But the demonstrations quickly became part of the infighting between the pro- and anti-reformist forces in Iran. Several days after the first demonstrations, large counter-demonstrations were organised by conservatives loyal to the Supreme Guide (*veliyat-e faqih*) Ali Khomehni, and to the concept of the Supreme Guide. Reformist demonstrators demanded a lessening of oppression, resignation of top police officials and of the Supreme Guide himself. The mid-July demonstrations were clearly a major struggle to influence the direction of the Islamist government in Iran. The initial demonstrations were also a challenge to both the conservative and reformist Islamist politics of the Islamic regime.¹⁴ The extent of the opposition became clear in mid-September when the Iranian government announced that 1500 people had been taken into custody, of whom 200 were held for interrogation. Forty-five of the 200 were detained, 100 were fined and received jail sentences, 20 were acquitted and four were sentenced to death. The status of the remaining 31 was unclear.

Iranian Kurdish nationalists were quick to point out that the youth demonstrations in July had been encouraged by the Kurdish demonstrations throughout Iranian Kurdistan in February protesting at the capture of Öcalan; demonstrations that the Kurds used to attack the regime in Tehran. The Kurds stated that the subsequent crackdown on the demonstrations was reminiscent of the harshness used against the Kurds in February: 'The demonstrations in Kurdistan and murder of the demonstrators can be seen as a catalyst to the riot events in Tehran and the instability caused by them. The February demonstrations by Kurds motivated and encouraged the students of Tehran, instead of being a lesson for non-Kurds not to demonstrate.'¹⁵

Turkey waded into Iran's domestic political fray on the side of the demonstrators. Prime Minister Ecvit noted that the violence was a 'natural reaction' of the Iranian people to an 'oppressive regime'. 'The Iranian people', stated Ecevit, 'are a people with a rich historical and cultural background. They could not be expected to bear the outdated regime of oppression for a long time.'¹⁶

The Kemalist Turkish media could hardly contain its glee regarding the tumult in Iran. They gave a *quid pro quo* for the arrogance with which the Iranian media had treated the Kavakçı affair just two months previously. Now Iranian women were demanding the right to throw off the *chador*: the very demand of Turkish women who opposed Kavakçı and the wearing of the *türban*. As far as the Kemalist government officials and media were concerned, the demonstrations against the Islamic regime vindicated their own onslaught against 'reactionism'.

As the repercussions of the mid-July turmoil continued, Iran, as mentioned above, accused Turkey of bombing sites on Iranian territory and killing five people. The bombing raid was alleged to have taken place near Piranshahr, a city about 40 miles south of the triangle where the borders of Turkey, Iran and Iraq meet. Ironically, the site was close to Qotur, an area that Iran had received from Turkey in 1932, when the two countries signed the Turkey–Iran Frontier Treaty which delimited the border between the two countries. Iran had received the portion of territory around Qotur in exchange for granting Turkey the right to the

eastern slopes of Mt Ararat, from which Kurds had staged a rebellion in 1930. The bombing raid of July 1999 raised all this old history, all of it connected to the Kurdish question. Contrary to Turkey's claims, Iran said there were no PKK camps in the region. Turkey, said Iran, had deliberately attacked its border forces. Furthermore, along with Israel, it was behind the demonstrations in Tehran. Iranian officials pointed out that the bombing raid took place just a few days after President Demirel's visit to Israel.¹⁷ 'We reserve the right to retaliate', said foreign ministry officials.¹⁸ The Iranians asserted they would not return two captured Turkish soldiers until Turkey paid compensation.

For its part, Turkey rejected all Iran's claims and ridiculed its assertions that Turkey had 'invaded' Iran. 'If we had intended to invade Iran, we would not have done so with two soldiers', replied Ecevit. Turkey's top general, Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu, responded to Iran's charges stating, 'Turkey has not bombed territory in Iran; rather it was in Iraq; further, it is impossible for Turkish pilots to miss or mistake a target because all targets and their coordinates are programmed with accurate maps into a computer. It is impossible to make a mistake.'¹⁹ Kıvrıkoğlu admitted that it was possible that Iranian soldiers had entered this region of Iraq and got caught in the bombing raid. At any rate the area bombed, wherever it was, was a base for the PKK. When pressed by journalists as to what were the real intentions of Iran, the general replied, 'Iran's intentions have never changed [niyetleri hiç değişmedi]. From 1639 there has not been a war between us, but Iran has never wanted a strong Turkey. It seems clear that Iran's intention is to show Turkey as an aggressive country.' When asked about Iranian claims that US troops were about to be sent to northern Iraq, the general replied that the claim was 'completely false'. President Demirel, when asked if the tension between Turkey and Iran resembled that between Turkey and Syria of the previous October answered, 'The time is different, conditions are different and the situation is different. Channels are open between the two countries and talks are being held.'²⁰

Iran was not of the same mind as Turkey regarding its assessment of the real intentions of the bombing raid. Bahman Akhavar, a member of Iran's Parliament (*majlis*) Commission for Defence Affairs said, 'Turkey's attack was a new strategy and scenario based on analysis by the foreign media that a new revolution is taking place in Iran. Considering the recent visit of the US Defense Secretary William Cohen to the Middle East and the visit of the Turkish President to Occupied Palestine, this move by Turkey cannot be taken as a marginal bombing raid.'²¹

Iran was even more sensitive than usual to the suspected machinations of Israel and American Jews and, hence, the US government, as all three were waging a relentless media campaign against Iran over the arrest of 13 Jews in June 1999 on charges of spying for the USA. The ensuing international campaign to compel Iran to release the 13 was still at its height during the July demonstrations and Turkey's alleged bombing of Iran's territory.²² At the time of the July demonstrations and Turkey's bombing raid the fate of the 13 Jews was still unclear. The arrest of the Jews seemed to be part of the infighting among the different factions in Iran. By July 2000 the fate of the Jews was still unclear, although nine of the 13 during their June 2000 trial in Shiraz had

'confessed' to spying for Israel. Israel, the USA, European countries and their Jewish communities were making strenuous efforts to have the Jews released.²³

As both President Demirel and General Kırıkçıoğlu stated, there were obviously many compelling geopolitical and geostrategic reasons why Turkey and Iran had not gone to war for some 360 years, many of which have been discussed above. By 1 August both countries had sent large military delegations to the bombed sites. Turkey admitted that maybe a few of its bombs had inadvertently struck Iranian soil. For its part, Iran was willing to acknowledge that the bombing had been a mistake. By such acknowledgments, it was clear that both countries thought it was no longer in their interests to pursue the matter much further. On 9 August Iran turned over the two captured soldiers to Turkey. On 10 August Iranian Deputy Interior Minister Golamhossein Bolandian, in Ankara as head of the Iranian delegation to discuss the results of the bombing, commented, 'I want the whole world to know that Turkish-Iranian ties are gradually growing. The temporary dispute has ended.'²⁴ On 11 August the Turks and Iranians signed another border security co-operation agreement. One week after settling the bombing raid dispute, one of the most devastating earthquakes in its history struck Turkey. The devastation caused by the 17 August earthquake, in which some 20 000 people were killed, led to a temporary halt in the propaganda wars between the two countries. It was noted in the Turkish press, however, that, despite Iran's sending of substantial earthquake relief to Turkey, Tehran did go ahead with air and ground military manoeuvres just a few days after the earthquake, as if, noted the Turkish media, it was in retaliation for the 18 July bombing raid. By early March 2000 the bombing raid no longer received press coverage and it was never acknowledged whether Turkey paid Iran the promised compensation or not. The bombing raid incident clearly affected Iran's geopolitical and geostrategic space in northern Iraq and its wider interests in the Gulf and Middle East; hence, its response was stronger than in the cases of the mayors and Kavakçı.

From the 11 August 1999 Security and Co-operation Understanding against 'terrorist groups' and the subsequent 17 August earthquake to the end of 1999 there were no major flare-ups between the two countries other than the usual accusations of Turkish officials that Iran continued to support the PKK. Turkey took advantage of the appointment of a new ambassador to Iran, Turan Morali, to announce that 'certain misunderstandings' should not prevent the two countries from playing an 'essential role in guaranteeing a stable and prosperous region'. President Khatami replied, 'Many countries do not want Iran and Turkey to have good relations and try to prevent the strengthening of ties between the Islamic Republic and Turkey'.²⁵ There were signs of trouble ahead, however. On 20 October Turkish police arrested 92 members of the Hizbullah which was, media and government sources claimed, a Kurdish-led Islamist counter-PKK organisation, many of whose members, claimed the Turkish press, were trained in Iran.²⁶

The assassination by car bomb on 21 October of Ahmet Taner Kışlalı, a well known professor and journalist devoted to secularism and Kemalism, one day after the arrest of 92 Hizbullahs 'trained in Iran' led to blistering attacks in the press that Tehran not only supported the PKK, but also the deadly Islamist

Hizbullah who, it was claimed, advocated and tried to establish an Islamist-Kurdish state in southeast Turkey throughout the 1990s. Just one day after Kışlalı's assassination, three Iranians were detained at Istanbul airport while trying, it was alleged, to flee the country.²⁷

Kışlalı's murder was immediately compared with that of Uğur Mumcu, another well known journalist and Kemalist who was assassinated on 24 January 1993, and in which Iran had been implicated. Kışlalı's assassination raised the passions of the secularist-Islamist partisans to new heights. Iran's old nemesis, Mesut Yılmaz, head of the Motherland Party (MP) and one of the three leaders of the governing coalition declared, 'It is now becoming clear that the organizers of this crime were Iranians and that Kışlalı's murder has been carried out by the Islamic Great Eastern Raiders Front (IBDA-C)'.²⁸

Iran responded that it had nothing to do with Kışlalı's murder. Its restrained response was also probably the result of its preoccupation with President's Khatami's visit to France.²⁹ Tehran managed to note, however, that 'the arrest of the three Iranians ... indicates the influence of the pro-Zionist elements in some decision-making bodies in Turkey. Whenever there is a serious move to improve Iran-Turkey relations, certain circles try to undermine these attempts.'³⁰ One can detect a certain amount of Iranian frustration in that, whatever the degree of support Iran gave to the PKK or indeed, even the Hizbullah, it seems unlikely that Tehran, at least by the autumn of 1999, would have much interest in the assassination of Ahmet Kışlalı. In a news conference on 22 October, PM Ecevit was careful to make no accusations of Iran's involvement in the assassination.

In spite of the bruhaha over Kışlalı's murder, İlnur Cevik, the influential editor of the *Turkish Daily News*, advocated strongly that Turkey give priority to its gas project with Iran and not to the Blue Stream (Mavi Akım) project with Russia that seeks to bring gas to Turkey by pipeline under the Black Sea from Russia. He faulted Turkish officials for dragging their feet in not completing the project with Iran. For its part, Tehran announced that its portion of the pipeline would be finished sometime in mid-2000 and that it expected Turkey to finish its portion soon thereafter.³¹

The relative quiet at the end of 1999 did not last long into the Millennium. In mid-January Turkish police and security forces staged several simultaneous attacks throughout Turkey on strongholds and hideouts of Hizbullah, a Kurdish-led professedly Islamist organisation that had been created by Turkish security and intelligence organisations to attack PKK leadership and assassinate its leaders, as well as other Kurdish nationalists, especially in the southeast. Confessions of some of the captured leaders revealed that Hizbullah had killed scores of people and buried them in the basements, courtyards and gardens of their various hideouts in Istanbul, Ankara, Konya and Mersin, among other places. It was a grisly affair demonstrating to what depths the Turkish state had sunk in the 1990s in its efforts to eradicate the PKK and the Kurdish nationalist movement. The creation of the Hizbullah was similar to the state's co-operation with organised crime and international terrorists such as Adullah Çatlı and Alaattin Çakıcı.³² The charge by some politicians and journalists that Hizbullah was a creation of the TAF brought a sharp escalation between the Kemalists, TAF and Islamists. When Recai Kutan, the leader of the VT asked, 'Why did those

who regulate the democratic balance run their tanks through Sincan instead of sending them against the Hizbullah? [Demokrasiye balans ayarçılar tankları neden Sincan yerine Hizbullahçılar' in üzerine yürütmediler?]³³ Did the TAF show any balance in their actions against reactionism (*irticacılık*)?

In such circumstances it was only natural that many Turkish politicians and journalists should hold Iran responsible for supporting, funding and training the Hizbullah. Kenan Evren, the former Chief-of-the-General Staff and President of Turkey (1983–89), proclaimed that:

Hizbullah is the work of Iran [Hizbullah, İran'ın işi]. Iran has always been a problem for us. They [Iran] have never helped us. From the time of Selim the Grim [Yavuz Selim] they have been against us. Hizbullah grew and became powerful in the 1980s. I warned of the danger, but the politicians were worried about votes, hence the Hizbullah grew, as did others.³⁴

Accusations other than Evren's flew fast and furious that Hizbullah was a creature of Iran. Among the charges were that Hüseyin Veliöğlü, one of the leaders of the group who was killed in a shoot-out with police in Istanbul, had received his military training in Iran. Some of the captured Hizbullah alleged that their highest-ranking leaders received political and military training from Pasdaran, Iran's Revolutionary Guard Command. After receiving their training near Tehran, they were transferred to Qom where the Hizbullah was headed by Melle Enver, a Kurd from Silvan, a small town in the southeast of Turkey. Gökhan Aydiner, the super-governor of the southeast region under martial law (OHAL), charged that, in addition to the guerrilla warfare and killings that the Hizbullah carried out, they also served as spies (*casus*) for Iran. Aydiner charged further that the Hizbullah's operations, tactics and methods resembled those that Iran used. Hizbullah, said the governor, wanted to set up an Iranian-style Islamist regime in Turkey.³⁵ Kemal İskender, Director of Security in Ankara, said that the Hizbullah leaders responsible for operations in Ankara and Inner Anatolia, and for weapons procurement, were all trained in Iran (Bu kişilerin İran bağlantısı var). They went to Iran for their military and theoretical training. 'Iran's Secret Service is in the middle of this work'.³⁶ İskender also suggested that the Hizbullah had been involved in the murder of Uğur Mumcu.

Iran was even more strongly implicated in the death of Konca Kuriş, a young Turkish feminist and activist who was one of the victims of the Hizbullah. Kuriş had been a member of the group for a short period of time, during which she visited Iran in 1996 as a delegate from Turkey to attend the World Muslim Women's Day. Ironically, it was after visiting Iran that Konca left the Hizbullah, apparently the reason why she was murdered. At her funeral in Mersin her father-in-law, Abullah Kuriş, blamed her feminist Islamist stridency on Iran: 'If Konca had not gone to Iran, what happened would not have been so contagious'.³⁷ The message of the Turkish press was clear: visiting Iran and following the example of Iranian women was the kiss of death not just for secular women, but for Islamist women as well as. The fate of Merve Kavakçı paled in comparison to that of Konca Kuriş.

It was perhaps fortunate that Kemal Kharrazi was visiting Istanbul when the Hizbullah story broke in the Turkish press. He denied categorically that

Hizbullah received any support whatsoever from Iran. 'We too', he said, 'reject the PKK and absolutely do not accept what they did.' When he was asked what measures Iran had taken against the 'PKK terrorist organisation', he replied, 'Both countries want to eradicate [temizlenmesini] such a terror presence from its land. There are long borders between the two countries and there are those who take advantage of this. The important thing is that the flow of information be strong.' He acknowledged there were direct telephone connections and that in the event of any occurrence communication could be immediately established. The foreign minister also took the opportunity once again to criticise Turkey's military agreements with Israel and stated that it was Israel that was behind the plan to create a Kurdish state in northern Iraq. He also emphasised that the national gas project between the two countries had not stopped and that it was only delayed temporarily because of Turkey's inability to find the revenue to complete the pipeline. He made a point of saying that 'Natural gas will become a symbol of Turkey-Iran relations. This project will allow Turkey not to be dependent on one source.'³⁸

It is notable that that the 'dispute' over the bombing raid as well as Ecevit's remarks in support of the July demonstrations and the Hizbullah affair of January-February 2000 did not result in the expulsion of ambassadors or other high ranking diplomatic officials, unlike the expulsions of 1989 and 1997, both of which resulted from Turkey's assertions that Iran was interfering in its domestic politics by encouraging 'reactionism', ie both Islamic fundamentalism and Kurdish nationalism. In spite of similarities in the Kavakçı and Hizbullah cases, ambassadors were not expelled. But Iranian ambassador Lavasani's comments on the Kavakçı affair were much more guarded than those of Mohammad Bagheri in Sincan. Furthermore, most of the accusations and counter-accusations in July 1999 were made by officials within the confines of their own country and not by representatives hosted in each other's country as had been the case in 1989 and 1997.

The tumult in Turkey-Iran relations in July resulting from the Kavakçı affair, the July bombing raid and the Hizbullah affair indicated that neither country wanted a repeat of the expulsions of ambassadors that had occurred in 1989 and 1997. The implication for both countries was that each understood that the Kavakçı affair, the July demonstrations against the Iranian regime and the Hizbullah scandal were largely, if not completely, internally generated. The reason why the 18 July bombing raid caused greater heightening of rhetoric is that Iran realised that, amid the turmoil of the demonstrations, as well as the Jewish spy case, Turkey was trying to assert pressure on Iran to sever its relationship with the PKK, as it represented both an internal and external threat to Turkey. Iran understood that any lack of a strong response on its part would have weakened its position in northern Iraq and, hence, its entire geopolitical position in the Gulf region, with eventual repercussions in the Caucasus. The Turkish bombing raid into Iran, accidental or not, was of much more geopolitical import to Iran than even the July demonstrations. For whatever regime was in power in Iran, Islamist or not, it would have to defend Iran's geopolitical space in northern Iraq which, in turn, affected its entire geostrategic position in the Middle East. As for the Hizbullah affair, it may well be that Iran was satisfied

that the terror network that Turkey had created against the PKK and Kurdish nationalists was a house of cards that was collapsing on the dealer.

In May 2000, however, it was Iran's turn for its house of cards to collapse. At the beginning of the month, while police operations against Hizbullah and the uncovering of their various burial grounds were still underway, it was announced in the Turkish media that the killers of some 17 well known Turkish journalists, politicians, professors and other public figures had been apprehended. Those arrested 'confessed' that they had received training and support from operatives and agents of Iranian intelligence in the 'Jerusalem Warriors' Organisation' (Kuds Mujahidin Örgütü) purportedly part of the Pasdaran. The revelations created a major crisis in Turkey-Iran relations. The 'assassination crisis' was more serious than the other crises discussed above because, as far as the Turkish media was concerned, the assassinations were direct meddling, with criminal intent, in Turkey's internal affairs.

Turks were especially outraged by the alleged Iranian involvement in the bombing assassinations of Prof Bahriye Üçok (6 October 1990), Muammer Aksoy (31 January 1991), Uğur Mumcu (24 January 1993) and Professor Ahmet Taner Kışalı (21 October 1999). Officials of the Interior Ministry claimed they had determined by means of ballistic and laser tests the origins of the weapons and bomb materials used in the assassinations. They also claimed the information leading to the arrests resulted from interrogation of Hizbullah members. Turkish officials were eager to make connections between the Hizbullah and the assassins. Islamist connections were also established when large amounts of plastic explosives, timers, magnets and other paraphernalia used in time-bomb assassinations were discovered in Sincan, the suburb of Ankara where the 'Jerusalem Night' celebrations had taken place on 31 January-2 February 1997 that had resulted in the expulsion of Iranian ambassador Mohammad Bagheri because of his Islamist, anti-Israel speech and Mohammad Reza Rashid and Said Zare, Iran's consuls in Istanbul and Erzurum.³⁹ The TAF subsequently paraded a convoy of tanks through the main street of Sincan in a show of force to intimidate the 'reactionaries'.

Allegations of all kinds cascaded forth in the Turkish press. Media reported that the Tevhid Selam (Greeting to Oneness) organisation, headquartered in Malatya, was behind the assassinations. Its newspaper, *Selam* (Greetings), was created in 1979 after the Iranian revolution by Nurettin Şirin, an alleged supporter of the ideals of the Islamic revolution. Şirin was said to have been present at the Jerusalem Night celebrations in Sincan. Turkish media reported that both Tevhid Selam, its newspaper and the 'Jerusalem Warriors' who carried out the assassinations were part of an assassination brigade created within Iran's Pasdaran.⁴⁰ It was unclear from the media reports how many members of Tevhid Selam were Kurds. Since it was headquartered in Malatya, which is a heavily Kurdish populated area, one can assume that Kurds were among its members.

Turkish foreign ministry officials were much more circumspect than interior ministry officials or the media. They stated that no assassination dossier would be forwarded to Tehran until all evidence was collected, although one diplomat was quoted as saying, 'If the Foreign Ministry was supplied with concrete evidence, then Tehran may be pressured to end its support for the PKK'.⁴¹ The

media speculated that the TAF wanted 'to finish off the PKK-affiliation in all Turkey's neighbouring countries before they would be able to address the profound problems of Southeast Turkey'.⁴² Turkish media claimed that Iran still harboured some 1500 PKK and 53 members of Hizbullah. As in the accounts mentioned above, Iran's support for the PKK remained Turkey's primary concern.

The strongest criticism of Iran came from PM Ecevit, seemingly in disagreement with Foreign Minister İsmail Cem as to what attitude to take towards Iran. On 17 May, the same day that Ahmet Necdet Sezer was sworn in as the new president of Turkey, Ecevit emphasised in a news conference that Iran for years 'had provided shelter to separatist terrorists' and that Iran was still trying 'to export its revolution: opening one's arms to those who contributed to separatist terrorism in Turkey can actually be seen as interference in our domestic affairs. Unfortunately, certain separatist terrorists and fundamentalist organizations in Turkey have, in a way, benefited from Iranian hospitality and have exploited for their own benefit Iran's tendency to export its revolution.'⁴³

Ecevit did, however, like Foreign Ministry officials, try to adopt a conciliatory tone by drawing a distinction between the killers, their alleged Iranian supporters and the Khatami government. İlnur Çevik commented on Ecevit's remarks, stating, as he had previously:

Turkish authorities knew the importance of maintaining good ties with Tehran. Iran is an important regional partner not only in the Middle East, but also in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Iran may not only block Turkey's plans to become a major energy supply route, but it can physically stall Turkey's access to Central Asia. Iran needs Turkey as much as Turkey needs Iran. Turkey, too, can hurt Iran's regional interests. If Iranian extremists have been involved in crimes in Turkey, the current regime is obliged to catch them and bring them to justice. Only then can the Khatami regime be taken seriously. But first we need to bring hard proof that Iranian extremists or agents actually participated in the assassination of prominent Turks.⁴⁴

Another prominent editorialist, Mehmed Ali Birand, even made the case that, according to his sources, after the 1979 revolution Iran was concerned about the anti-Islamist regime activities of some 400 000 to 500 000 Iranians who at one time or another had taken refuge in Turkey and engaged in anti-Iran activities in concert with rich anti-regime Iranians in Europe and the USA. In order to contain and intimidate the Iranians in Turkey, Tehran sent some 10 000 agents to the country. Most of the Iranians who were killed in Turkey were members of or supported the Mojahedin-e khalq. Birand acknowledged that it was only with the May revelations that he realised the extent to which Iranian agents had solicited the aid of Turkish collaborators, hit-men and mafia.⁴⁵ Birand suggested that one way to control the agent traffic between Turkey and Iran was to require visas for Iranians. The downside of this was that undoubtedly Iran would retaliate by requiring visas of Turks, which in turn would result in the stopping of Turkish and international truck transport via Iran to the Gulf countries.

Other, more critical media, stated that Ankara condoned the existence of the Iranian agents and that over the past two decades 'more than 200 Iranian dissidents' had been killed in Turkey and 'these murders have hardly been

investigated'. The *Radikal* newspaper alleged that 83 of the dissidents extradited to Iran were executed upon arrival. Why, asked *Radikal*, did Turkey not deport the Iranians in a westerly direction?⁴⁶ By not doing so it seemed that Turkey condoned the assassination of Iranian dissidents both within Turkey and in Iran after extradition. Did Turkey hope for less Iranian support for the PKK in return? By revealing the assassinations in May 2000 did Turkey think the time was now appropriate, with the defeat of the PKK and the struggle for power in Iran, to put pressure on the Khatami government finally to end all aid to the PKK and its affiliates in Turkey as well as in Iran?

Tehran did not take Ecevit's remarks lying down. On 18 May Iranian Foreign Minister Kemal Kharrazi responded that Ecevit's comments were an unacceptable interference in Iran's internal affairs. Iranian media stated that Ecevit, of all people, should realise that 'the PKK's incentive for struggle is ethnic discrimination in that country [Turkey]. On the other hand, the growing trend of Islamist tendencies in Turkey has nothing to do with the Islamic revolution in Iran. Mr Ecevit should not give in to the pressure of Zionist circles. Documents presented by some official Turkish organizations indicate that the alleged supporters of such an idea and such organizations as Hizbollah are fabrics of Turkey's intelligence agency.'⁴⁷ A lead article in the *Tehran Times* opined that Iran did not understand why Turkey was making such a fuss about crimes committed some seven to ten years ago. 'Many observers believe', stated the *Times*, 'that making a commotion about these murders and accusing Iran of involvement at this junction is due to the pressure from the Zionist regime, which is trying to divert the world's public attention from the trial of the Iranian Jews who have confessed to spying for the Zionist regime'.⁴⁸

The crisis of the killings led not only to a diplomatic war and new tensions between Ankara and Tehran, but to a dilemma for new Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer. On the very day of his swearing-in ceremony, when asked whether or not, in light of Iranian involvement in the assassinations, he would attend the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) meeting to be held in Tehran on 10 June he replied, 'I am thinking of not going [Gideceğimi düşünmüyorum]'.⁴⁹ Whether Sezer would or would not attend the ECO meeting was the subject of much speculation in the media throughout the rest of May and early June.

Most of the respected editorialists were in favour of Sezer attending the ECO. They argued: 1) it would be Sezer's first foreign trip abroad and symbolic that Turkey did not intend to disrupt the wider relations between the two countries; 2) Sezer's visit would not be an official visit, but simply to attend the ECO; 3) Sezer would be able in an 'unofficial' capacity to emphasise to Tehran that activities such as the assassinations were unacceptable to Turkey; 4) whatever the status between Turkey and Iran, Sezer could take advantage of the meeting to confer with the heads of state of the Central Asian states as well as Azerbaijan, all of them important countries for Turkey's geostrategic interests; 5) Sezer could use the meeting to co-ordinate policy with the above countries, as well as Iran, *vis-à-vis* Russia and the policies of its new President, Vladimir Putin, to reassert Russian power in Central Asia and the Caucasus; 6) it was necessary for Sezer to make his own mark on foreign policy and to distinguish

himself from that of former president Süleyman Demirel, who had played such an important role in Turkey's policy toward those countries; 7) Turkey's foreign ministry and Foreign Minister İsmail Cem were in favour of his attendance; 8) Sezer's attendance would indicate that Ankara understood that Khatami and the reformers did not have control over the military and intelligence agencies who were allegedly lending their support to operatives in Turkey; and 9) if Sezer did not assert himself in the foreign policy arena, then others, such as Ecevit, would, resulting in a weakening of his presidency.⁵⁰ Hüseyin Bağcı in a lead editorial in the TDN stated bluntly that Sezer must attend the ECO meeting 'for the sake of the country's national interests'.⁵¹

Even as the media debated the pros and cons of Sezer's attendance at the ECO, it was announced at the end of May that Turkey and Iran had signed more trade agreements, reducing the customs tax at their border crossings, and that two of the most important crossings—Gürbulak and Bezergan—would be open day and night; both countries would raise the customs at the border crossings in order to lessen smuggling; their respective foreign trade banks would co-operate more closely and both would try to turn the ECO into a common market (*ortak Pazar*).⁵² The agreement was reached as a result of a Turkish trade delegation to Tehran led by Foreign Trade Minister Kürsad Tüzmen and comprised of 120 prominent Turkish businessmen.⁵³ Tüzmen stated that Turkey would continue its sensitive (*hassas*) policies towards Iran despite the recent revelations. His Iranian counterpart, Reza Shafei, pleaded that Turkey 'should not compare us to the previous [Rafsanjani] government. President Khatami is not responsible for the legacy of the past. We want to open a new page with you.'⁵⁴

The announcement of 7 June that Sezer would not attend the ECO was something of a surprise to the media pundits. It seemed the result not only of the killings of prominent Turks, but also of the new announcement that Ahmad Behbahani, an alleged co-ordinator of the terrorist activities of Iran carried on inside and outside the country and the head of security for former President Rafsanjani, had turned himself over to the MIT, the Turkish intelligence agency. Behbahani reportedly stated that he had killed Dr Abdurrahman Qassemloo, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Iran (KDPI) in Vienna in 1989.⁵⁵ Media reports suggested that Behbahani had been working with Turkish security for some time and his aid had helped Turkish intelligence apprehend the killers involved in the various assassinations carried out in Turkey during the previous two decades. It was also speculated that Behbahani would reveal to Turkish authorities the 'many details and secrets of the Kurdish parties and groups which had close ties with Iran'.⁵⁶ Iran characterised Behbahani as 'a common crook, criminal and a member of the *mujahedin-i-halk*'.⁵⁷ By mid-June Turkish intelligence and the CIA announced that Behbahani was an imposter. On 5 June Iran sent Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Adeli to Ankara to request Sezer's attendance at the ECO, but on 7 June, as mentioned above, the decision was made that he would not attend. However, the attendance at the ECO of a whole coterie of high ranking Turkish officials and the signing of significant trade agreements just before the summit implied, as pundits and politicians had suggested, that Turkey-Iran relations were back on track and Sezer's absence was largely symbolic.

As this article was being written it was unclear what effect these latest developments would have on Turkey–Iran relations. It seemed clear, however, that the ‘assassination crisis’ increased Ankara’s leverage to use the crisis to further pressure Iran to sever all support to the PKK in Iran, Syria, Europe and elsewhere. The crisis was also bound to increase the struggle among reformists and hardline factions in Iran. There was no doubt that Turkey would take advantage of the crisis to suppress further the ‘reactionary’ forces in Turkey.

Conclusion

In spite of the seriousness of the sixth and last crisis in Turkey–Iran relations discussed in this article, it seems likely that both countries will weather the latest crisis as they have the previous five. The six crises from 1997 to early 2000 demonstrate that Turkey became more strongly positioned as a result of them and was able to use the crises to strengthen its geopolitical position *vis-à-vis* Iran by destroying the PKK and controlling and squelching the Kurdish nationalist and Islamist movements in Turkey. The 28 February 1997 agenda of the TAF to crush ‘reactionism’ (*irticacılık*) and to finish off the PKK seemed to have been quite successful by July 2000. This seemed to be confirmed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who announced at the VT party elections for a new chairman, amid the revelations of the ‘killing crisis’, that the VT would ‘no longer use religious motifs or stories in its party rhetoric’, to raise the consciousness of the voters as to where their true interests lay.⁵⁸ The PKK card also became less useful for Iran after the capture of Abdullah Öcalan in February 1999. While the Turkish government was asserting its full range of military, intelligence and police powers against the Islamists and the Kurdish nationalists, the Iranian government remained divided. From his accession to power in August 1997 to mid-summer 2000 President Khatami was unable to gain control of the military, intelligence or judicial systems. All three institutions were largely responsible for contributing to the crises with Turkey.

The irony of Iran’s involvement in the six crises discussed in this article is that it facilitated the efforts of the Turkish government, with its Kemalist orientation, to gain leverage against its primary domestic challengers—the Kurdish nationalist and Islamist movements. In other words, the Iranian regime facilitated the diminishment of both movements that were the principal challengers to the Kemalist and TAF-backed governments in Turkey. Tehran helped to weaken the Islamist movement in Turkey which professed ideals and policies close to its own. It did so for two reasons: it was unable to assert itself more forcefully because of the inability of any administration to establish its dominance in politics and, more importantly, because of its weakened position it did not want to jeopardise its wider geopolitical and geostrategic interests in Central Asia and the Caucasus by aiding too forcefully the Islamist or Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey. Turkey, for its part, co-operated with the various regimes in Tehran in the hope that they would not interfere in its domestic politics by supporting either the Kurdish nationalist movement or the Islamist movement with the vigour that they could have. As discussed above, Ankara too did not want Iran to pursue policies that would jeopardise its ability to access the energy

sources and markets of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Both countries were fortunate in that many of their geopolitical and geostrategic differences were/are able to be played out in northern Iraq.⁵⁹

This study also affirms the relevance of omni-balancing as the best theory to explain Turkey's and Iran's foreign policies. Omni-balancing can be construed to include three international relations theories: the 'rational actor', the 'irrational actor', and the 'capital accumulator', in that they represent three implicit survival requisites that potentially shape policy: national interests and external threats; domestic politics and internal ideological legitimisation needs; and economic needs. Two of its proponents, Anushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond Hinnebusch state, 'In a given regime and at any given time, threats to one or the other may be dominant in decision-maker's calculations, although in the long run if any are neglected, regime stability is put to risk'.⁶⁰ This study validates this assertion. The two authors also suggest that

the notion of omni-balancing could also be extended by taking rationality [of the neo-realist school] to mean attending not only to security threats [both internal and external] but also to capital accumulation and rent acquisition requisites. Since these various requisites of state-formation may conflict in any give situation, and no policy is therefore likely to appear fully rational from all points of view, the highest rationality may be the ability to make a reasonable series of tradeoffs.⁶¹

The geopolitical and geostrategic concerns of Turkey and Iran in the 1990s and in the early 2000s are clearly associated with their economic needs. These economic needs have compelled them to seek accomodation in the geopolitical and geostrategic arena in order that such accommodation may prevent or lessen the desire of either state to try to use the Kurdish, Islamist or internal dissidence cards in order to jeopardise the other's regime. If either country does not meet these challenges adequately, their status as middle-level-ranking states could be weakened. The six crises discussed here suggest that Iran's interests have been weakened more than Turkey's.

Notes

¹ For a discussion of Turkey-Iran relations before this period see R Olson, *The Kurdish Question and Turkish-Iranian Relations: From World War I to 1998*, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Press, 1998. See also N Entessar, 'Whither Iranian-Turkish relations?', *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis*, 16 (1), pp 110-122.

² S R David, 'Explaining Third World alignment', *World Politics*, 43 (2), 1991, pp 233-256; and A Ehteshami & R Hinnebusch, *Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Region*, New York: Routledge, 1997, pp 5-7, 198. See also Olson, *The Kurdish Question*, pp 11-14 for the role that northern Iraq plays in the geopolitical jockeying of Turkey and Iran.

³ *TKRWS-L*, 22 April 1998. This is an online newsletter predominantly concerned with Turkish affairs.

⁴ Vural Savaş, the head prosecutor of Turkey's constitutional court (Yargıtay) was not impressed with the more moderate line of the vt. On 7 October 1998 he stated, 'If they [vt] receive 99.9 percent of the vote, I will still shut it down ... just like the wp, we will shut it down', *Hürriyet*, 8 October 1998. Savaş had still more to gloat about: in October the appeal court ruled that Abdullah Gül, the secretary general of the vt, had to pay Savaş 1.5 million lira for insulting the prosecutor's character. *Hürriyet*, 17 October 1998.

⁵ For developments leading up to the expulsions see Olson, *The Kurdish Question*, pp 56-58.

⁶ H Yavuz & M Khan, 'Turkey and the guns of August', *Middle East International*, 573, 1998, p 9.

⁷ In May 2000 a newspaper of which Karbaschi was the editor and which he had founded just 90 days previously was closed by hard-line opponents in the judiciary system.

- ⁸ *Iran Times*, 28 January 2000.
- ⁹ See Olson, *The Kurdish Question*, pp 77–87.
- ¹⁰ *TRKNWS-L*, 9 May 1999
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, 10 May 1999
- ¹² *Iran Times*, 21 May 1999.
- ¹³ For a range of views on the cause and importance of the student riots, see *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis*, 15 (2), November 1999.
- ¹⁴ *Iran Times*, 16 July 1999; Associated Press, 16 July 1999; *Middle East Research and Information Project* (MERIP), Special Report from Iran, 15 July 1999; and *New York Times*, 15 July 1999.
- ¹⁵ *Kurdish Media Research Unit*, 17 July 1999. I received this report via the Washington Kurdish Institute link.
- ¹⁶ *Iran Times*, 16 July 1999; and *Hürriyet*, 14 July 1999.
- ¹⁷ Demirel visited Israel from 14 to 16 July.
- ¹⁸ *Hürriyet*, 20 July 1999.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*.
- ²⁰ *Hürriyet*, 30 July 1999; and *Iran Times*, 30 July 1999.
- ²¹ *Tehran Times*, 20 July 1999.
- ²² *Iran Times*, 18 June 1999.
- ²³ Eshaq Niknava, head of the Jewish Society of Shiraz told the Associated Press that the imprisoned included ‘merchants, a 17 year old boy, rabbis and two civil servants’. *Iran Times*, 7 January 2000.
- ²⁴ *TRKNWS-L*, 10 August 1999.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, 14 September 1999; 18 October 1999.
- ²⁶ *Ibid*, 20 October 1999.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, 23 October, 1999.
- ²⁸ UPI, 28 October 2000.
- ²⁹ Khatami visited France from 27 to 31 October 1999.
- ³⁰ *Tehran Times*, 24 October 1999.
- ³¹ *TRKNWS-L*, 7 November 1999.
- ³² On this topic see R Olson, ‘Turkey–Syria relations: from the Gulf War to the expulsion of Öcalan’, (forthcoming in *Orient*).
- ³³ *Hürriyet*, 22 January 2000.
- ³⁴ *Ibid*, 24 January, 2000.
- ³⁵ *Ibid*, 21 January 2000.
- ³⁶ *Ibid*.
- ³⁷ *Hürriyet*, 24 January 2000.
- ³⁸ *Hürriyet*, 20 January 2000.
- ³⁹ Olson, *The Kurdish Question*, pp 56–58.
- ⁴⁰ *Hürriyet*, 9 May 2000.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*, 14 May 2000.
- ⁴² *TDN*, 13 May 2000.
- ⁴³ *Hürriyet*, 17 May 2000.
- ⁴⁴ *TDN*, 18 May 2000.
- ⁴⁵ *Hürriyet*, 18 May 2000.
- ⁴⁶ *Radikal*, 29 May 2000.
- ⁴⁷ *TRKNS-L*, quoting *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 18 May 2000.
- ⁴⁸ *Tehran Times*, 21 May 2000.
- ⁴⁹ *Hürriyet*, 18 May 2000.
- ⁵⁰ Sedat Ergin’s editorial, *Hürriyet*, 21 May 2000.
- ⁵¹ *TDN*, 1 June 2000.
- ⁵² *Hürriyet*, 21 May 2000.
- ⁵³ *TDN*, 1 June 2000.
- ⁵⁴ *Hürriyet*, 30 May 2000.
- ⁵⁵ Behbahani was the subject of CBS’s *60 Minutes* programme on 4 June 2000.
- ⁵⁶ *Kurdish Media*, 5 June 2000.
- ⁵⁷ Associated Press, 9 June 2000.
- ⁵⁸ *Hürriyet*, 15 May 2000.
- ⁵⁹ For the role that northern Iraq or Iraqi Kurdistan plays in the geopolitical and geostrategic interests of Turkey and Iran, see Olson, *The Kurdish Question*, pp 76–87.
- ⁶⁰ Ehteshami & Hinnebusch, *Syria and Iran*, pp 5–7, 198.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid*.