

Türkiye's Security Concerns, Strategic Implications, and Policy Responses in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region (2014-2024)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31918/twejer.2582.01>

Published: 10/08/2025

Abstract

This study examines Türkiye's security concerns, strategic implications, and policy responses toward Iraq and the Kurdistan Region over the 2014-2024 timeframe, with an emphasis on its counterterrorism strategies and its influence over the region. Based on neorealist theory, it investigates how Türkiye has used both offensive and defensive strategies to protect its security and establish its supremacy in the region. Also, the study focuses on how Türkiye's military strategies, diplomatic stance, and economic interests have changed over time, particularly in regard to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and bilateral security agreements intersected to tackle the PKK threats. The results highlight the nuanced nexus among Türkiye's security imperatives, the KRG's balancing strategy, and larger regional geopolitics. Thus, this study enhances knowledge of Türkiye's regional strategies and their impact on counterterrorism operations, sovereignty and stability across the Middle East.

Keyword: Türkiye, Security, Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), Iraq, and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

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1. Introduction

Türkiye's security interests in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region have played a central role in shaping its regional strategy over the last decade (2014–2024). Persistent threats such as the presence of the PKK in northern Iraq, the rise of ISIS, and broader regional instability have posed significant challenges to Türkiye's national security (Çevik, 2022). In response, Türkiye has adopted a multidimensional approach—combining military operations, diplomatic initiatives, and bilateral agreements—to contain the PKK threats, maintain regional influence and secure its borders (Cagaptay, 2025).

However, these measures have sparked important debates about sovereignty, the legality of cross-border activities, and the durability of Türkiye's counterterrorism initiatives. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) occupies a significant but intricate place in Türkiye's security structure as a major actor in northern Iraq. While its common economic interests lead to collaborate with Türkiye on security issues, internal political factors and its ties with the federal government in Baghdad influencing its actions.

Furthermore, in an effort to strengthen collaboration against the PKK, Türkiye and Iraq have signed a number of bilateral security agreements. Despite the fact

that cooperation has improved, it remains unclear how these agreements will affect Iraq's sovereignty and regional stability more broadly (Michalski, 2024).

In order to better understand the role of the KRG and the purpose of bilateral security accords, this study will look at how Türkiye's security concerns, strategic dynamics, and policy responses have changed over time in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Through an examination of these components, the study clarifies the intricate variables that influence Türkiye's regional security strategy and its consequences for counterterrorism, sovereignty, and the Middle East's long-term stability. The findings are significant not only to academics and decision-makers who examine Türkiye's foreign policy but also to international players and interested parties who are working to resolve the most significant regional security challenges.

1.1 Research Problem

Türkiye's security policies in Iraq and the Kurdistan region (2014–2024) have been dictated by national security threats such as the PKK's continued existence, the emergence of ISIS, and the absence of stability across the region. In response, Türkiye has pursued a multi-faceted strategy across military operations, diplomatic efforts, and bilateral security pacts. But it is still unclear whether these policies would yield long-term impact on regional security and counterterrorism. Key issues include the conflicting role of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and its role in Türkiye's counterterrorism efforts as well as the effectiveness of bilateral agreements with Iraq in dealing with the PKK threats. Additionally, the engagement of the third parties and limitations imposed by international law produce complications in Türkiye's policy responses.

1.2 Literature Review

A brief analysis of the main studies on the subject related to this research is reviewed below:

Kardaş Şaban's article "**Türkiye's Military Operations in Iraq: Context and Implications**" (2021) provides a thorough analysis of the origins and developments of Türkiye's assertive military involvement in Iraq since 2014. In order to comprehend Türkiye's increased operations against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in northern Iraq, Kardaş believes that it is essential to comprehend Ankara's adoption of a new counterterrorism strategy that is marked by a military regional policy and coercive diplomacy. He contends that deeper interventionism was made possible by Türkiye's ability to establish control over both Baghdad and Erbil as a result of shifting dynamics brought about by the liberation of Mosul and the unsuccessful referendum on Kurdish independence. Kardaş emphasizes that although these military actions might have a significant effect on the PKK's development, they also highlight the limits of Turkish hard power and the careful balance Ankara needs to keep in order to prevent upsetting the internal balance in Iraq or provoking tensions in the region, especially with Iran.

In its analysis "**Türkiye's Dual Track Approach Toward the Kurdistan Regional Government**," the Middle East Institute (2018) elaborates on the complexity of Ankara's strategy by tracking Türkiye's policy shift from non-recognition of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to a practical "Dual Track" approach. This strategy involves growing diplomatic, political, and economic ties with the KRG with increased military pressure on PKK strongholds. The study draws attention to the conflict within Turkish policy circles: pro-Kurdish actors and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which support engagement as a way to achieve collaboration, while military and nationalist groups support isolating the KRG to compel action against the PKK.

Using economic interdependence, as demonstrated by the growth of Turkish companies and high-level diplomatic endeavors in the KRG, the dual-track policy seeks to eradicate the PKK, protect Iraq's territorial integrity, and oppose Iranian influence.

Further, the Clingendael Institute recently released a policy brief by Aziz et al. (2022) titled "**Turkish Interventions in Its Near Abroad: The Case of KRI (Iraq)**," which further contextualizes Türkiye's interventions in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) as a component of a larger strategy to address its own Kurdish question. In order to keep the PKK and its affiliates from gaining control of territory, the brief argues that Türkiye wants to militarily destroy them while keeping the KRG—particularly the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)—as an obedient partner. A secondary but important goal is to encourage Turkmen and Sunni groups in order to counterbalance Iranian influence in disputed Iraqi territory. The study also points out that the legality and rigor of Türkiye's cross-border operations, which have significantly increased since 2018, are supported by internal political factors, including the AKP's collaboration with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).

Later on, the article "Potential Türkiye-Iraq Agreement: A Game-Changer in the Middle East" from the Yetkin Report for 2024 sheds more light on the changing security relationship between Türkiye and Iraq. This report describes how high-level visits and security interactions have increased, leading to talks about a complete deal between Türkiye and Iraq. The study highlights that ongoing conversations revolve upon mutual security concerns, particularly the PKK's presence in Iraq and Türkiye's military presence. Both nations' determination to formalize their security relationship is demonstrated by the proposed creation of a (30 to 40) kilometer "security corridor" inside Iraqi territory, which will be carried out through cooperative military and intelligence

efforts. Such events might bring about a dramatic change in the dynamics of regional security by allowing Iraq to reclaim control over disputed areas and permit cooperative operations against the PKK.

Finally, Adam Michalski's analysis, "A New Chapter in Turkish-Iraqi Relations?" published by the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) in 2024, describes the historic significance of President Erdoğan's visit to Baghdad and the signing of 26 bilateral agreements, including collaboration on security, defense, and military issues. According to the source, these agreements open the door for a massive Turkish military campaign against the PKK in Northern Iraq, most likely with Iraqi troops' cooperation and approval. The planned operation is to disrupt PKK supplies, create a border security corridor under Turkish control, and reduce the group's influence in Syria and Iraq. The study concludes that this new stage of collaboration not only strengthens Türkiye's ability to handle its security issues but also portends a more significant strategic realignment in the area, which will have an impact on the future of Turkish-Iraqi relations and the balance of power in the area.

Hence, although the reviewed studies above offer insightful information about Türkiye's changing military, political, and economic involvement in Iraq, many of them only addressed specific issues, like regional competition, bilateral relations, or counterterrorism, without providing a comprehensive analysis of the years 2014–2024. Furthermore, previous publications either have failed to fully examine the geopolitical implications of Türkiye's integrated policy toward the Kurdistan Region and Baghdad, or they ignored the post-ISIS situation. Without connecting them to more general security and geopolitical changes, even recent studies frequently have given priority to operational advancements or commercial relationships. Therefore, this study provides a thorough analysis of Türkiye's strategy toward Iraq from 2014 to 2024 in an effort to close that gap. Based on

neorealist theory, it examines how Turkish decision-making strategy has been impacted by changing political allegiances, changing security risks, and economic interests. By doing this, it aims to provide a more sophisticated understanding of Ankara's strategic thinking and how it affects both its relations with Iraq and the stability of the region.

1.3 Objectives

- To take stock of the evolution of Türkiye's security interests, strategic concerns, and policy responses in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region from 2014 to 2024, and the critical factors that have factored into these dynamics.
- To analyze the KRG's function in Türkiye's counter-terrorism policy and influence on regional stability.
- To examine the impact of bilateral security pacts between Türkiye and Iraq on the PKK threats and regional dynamics.

1.4 Research Questions

The main question of this study is:

- **How have Türkiye's security concerns, strategic implications, and policy responses in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region evolved between 2014 and 2024, and what factors have shaped these dynamics?**

The Secondary Question is:

- **What role has the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) played in Türkiye's counterterrorism strategy, and how have bilateral security agreements between Türkiye and Iraq influenced regional stability and the PKK threat?**

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it analyses the Türkiye's security concerns, strategic implications, and policy responses in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region (2014–2024). It explores the role of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Türkiye's counterterrorism strategy, elucidating the interconnections of security, economics, and politics. It further analyzes the effects of the bilateral security arrangements between Türkiye and Iraq on countering the PKK threats and maintaining regional stability. This analysis is valuable for policymakers, as well as scholars, and can also be useful for international stakeholders, offering implications for counterterrorism, sovereignty, and regional stability, which can be used to inform future policy and facilitate a more stable environment regionally.

1.6 Research Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design to explore Türkiye's security concerns derive from, strategic considerations regarding, and policy responses towards Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq both from cross-sections between 2014 and 2024. The research is based exclusively on secondary data; scholarly articles, books, government reports, and official statements from Turkish, Iraqi, and the KRG authorities (the president of Türkiye and the Prime Minister of the KRG). Reports from respectable international organizations, including the United Nations, put specific cases like Türkiye's military operations (for instance, Operation Claw-Lock) into perspective. In order to address the research questions, the data is thematically analyzed to recognize patterns, trends, and variables which influence Türkiye's policies, indicating a systematic and thorough investigations with credibly-based, well-cited sources.

Furthermore, this research adopts the neorealist theory as the main analytical framework. Utilizing neorealist paradigms, also the study explores the influence

of systemic power relations and state interests on Türkiye's regional strategies and security policies.

1.7 The Structure of Research

This study is organized in four main sections. In the introduction section, the context of Türkiye's security concerns in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region are provided, the research problem is defined and the significance and aim of the research are stated. Section two, Methodology, addresses the qualitative approach, secondary data sources, and thematic analysis used in the research questions. The body is divided into thematic sub-sections that evaluate Türkiye's security concerns, military operations, bilateral agreements, and the role of the KRG. The study then summarizes the main findings, providing a closure to the research.

2. Türkiye's Policy Toward Iraq according to Neorealist Theory

A popular theory in international relations, neorealism offers a framework for understanding how nations behave in anarchic international systems, in which there is no central authority to control interactions. According to this idea, states are rational actors that put their national interests and security first (Waltz, 1979, pp. 79–128). Offensive neorealism, which maintains that states are naturally aggressive and aim to maximize their power to ensure security, and defensive neorealism, which maintains that states act to maintain their security without overextending themselves, are the two primary forms of neorealism (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 29–54). Given the current events, this theoretical framework enables a comprehensive examination of Türkiye's evolving policy towards Iraq over the last decade, which reflect both its economic interests and security concerns.

Neorealism theory includes several key assumptions to explain state behavior. First, it assumes that, there is no supreme authority governing state-to-state relations and that the international system is anarchic (Waltz, 1979, p. 88). States are forced to put their own security and survival first in this context, which often lead to self-help attitude. Second, nations are rational actors that make calculated decisions based on their national interests, according to neorealism. This is especially true when it comes to how they react to perceived threats, which might result in conflict (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 32–33). Third, the theory highlights the importance of power, with nations aiming to protect their interests by improving their material capacities, mainly economic and military (Morgenthau, 1948, pp. 5–7).

A complex interplay of security concerns and economic interests emerges when these assumptions are applied to Türkiye's policy toward Iraq from 2014 to 2024. A major turning point for Türkiye was the emergence of ISIS in 2014, which forced it to reevaluate its regional security stance. In line with the principles of offensive neorealism, Türkiye took a more aggressive military posture in response to the prospect of ISIS spreading its influence close to its borders (Gilpin, 1981). The relationship between security and territorial integrity is shown by Türkiye's military actions in northern Iraq, especially against the PKK, a Kurdish militant group that has fought an insurgency for decades. Türkiye's aggressive strategy to eradicate perceived threats was highlighted by the military response to the PKK's actions, which were seen as an immediate threat and included airstrikes and ground invasions (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Furthermore, defensive neorealism, which emphasizes the necessity for nations to preserve their security without overextending themselves, might be used to explain Türkiye's behavior. In order to protect its territorial integrity, Türkiye often frames its military incursions into Iraq as essential steps against the

PKK's influence (Jervis, 1978). These actions, however, may cause tensions with the central government of Iraq, which would view Türkiye's presence as a violation of its sovereignty. This illustrates the security dilemma, in which Türkiye's attempts to protect itself unintentionally increase hostilities and prompt reactions from the neighboring countries (Jervis, 1978). These interactions show how Türkiye's military activities may be both a cause of regional instability and a tool of self-defense, underscoring the complexity of its strategic calculation.

Türkiye's policy towards Iraq is further impacted by economic factors. Due to its substantial oil and gas deposits, the area is a vital ally of Türkiye, especially when it comes to diversifying its energy supplies and lowering reliance on other sources (Morgenthau, 1948). Neorealism holds that states behave in their own economic best interests, and Türkiye's involvement in Iraq's energy sector is a prime example of this idea. Türkiye uses a combination of offensive and defensive strategies to advance its national goals by establishing economic relationships in an effort to secure essential energy supplies and increase its regional influence (Mearsheimer, 2001). Türkiye's recent attempts to strengthen energy accords with the Kurdish authorities in Iraq serve as another example of its regional strategy.

According to neorealism, states must adapt to shifting power structures, and Türkiye's aggressive strategy of setting up bases and carrying out operations in northern Iraq is reflective of its efforts to counterbalance Iranian dominance in the area. This exemplifies how nations compete to protect their interests from perceived threats as well as competing powers in international relations. However, Türkiye's reaction to the 2017 Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) Independence Referendum might be interpreted as a response to perceived threats to its territorial integrity and national unity, in accordance with Mearsheimer's theory of defensive realism. According to Mearsheimer, states act to protect their borders

and maintain their sovereignty, and Türkiye's reaction to the referendum is indicative of this defensive approach. In order to maintain stability and security in the region, Türkiye opposed the referendum in an effort to prevent separatist activities within its borders (Mearsheimer, 2001).

In conclusion, a strong theoretical foundation for comprehending Türkiye's policy toward Iraq between 2014 and 2024 is provided by neorealism. The interaction between aggressive and defensive strategies in Türkiye's foreign policy is exemplified by the anarchic structure of the international system as well as its economic interests and security concerns. By prioritizing its national security first and seeking to increase its regional power, Türkiye deals in challenging circumstances where the PKK, ISIS, and Iranian expansionism provide obstacles.

3. The Impacts of PKK Activities and ISIS Threats on Türkiye's National Security

Prior to 2014, Türkiye's main security mainly focused on the activities of the PKK in Iraq, the risk of a Kurdish state forming, and the need to protect the Turkmens. The 2003 U.S. invasion fueled those fears by shifting the regional power balance. Based in northern Iraq since the 1980s, the PKK became a serious threat to Türkiye's national security, leading to border-crossing operations based on self-defense but with questionable legality (Pusane, 2016; Keskin, 2008). The capture of the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan in 1999, had a dampening effect upon tensions, but post-2003 instability enabled a resurrection in the PKK's fortunes (Pusane, 2016). At the same time, one of Türkiye's main concerns was that Kurdish autonomy in Iraq, especially with the emergence of the Kurdistan

Regional Government (KRG), would give rise to separatist aspirations among Turkish Kurds (Migdalovitz, 2002; Aras, 2007). It also aimed to secure the safety of the Turkmens, who were exposed to Kurdish and Arab militia through military and logistical assistance (Gunter, 2010).

The PKK's activities and the rise of ISIS are two critical, yet interlocking components of Türkiye's national security threats. Both groups have been behind violent insurgencies, but their effects on Türkiye's security have been different on the internal and external level. The PKK, a Kurdish rebel group, which has been declared a terrorist organization by Türkiye, the U.S., and the EU has waged a long-running insurgency seeking autonomy for the Kurdish population in southeastern Türkiye. Its violent activities have specifically directed at Turkish military and civilian areas — killing thousands of (their) citizens and aggravating the region (Yazıcı, 2016).

On the internal level, the PKK's activities have exacerbated divisions within Türkiye, turning the Kurdish issue into a major domestic security problem (Gedik, 2013). Beyond armed attacks, the PKK has carried out cross-border operations, exploiting weak border security. These activities, such as smuggling and trafficking, have made it difficult for Türkiye to control its borders and disrupt PKK operations (Eren, 2013). Poor coordination between Turkish agencies has also allowed the PKK to remain active. To address this, Türkiye has been urged to strengthen its border security and work with other countries to stop illegal PKK activities while ensuring that legal trade continues (Eren, 2013). The PKK has also led asymmetric wars, attacking security forces, infrastructure, or other symbolic entities to gain political leverage (Gedik, 2013).

Additionally, on the external level, the PKK's activities have not been limited to within Türkiye but have also spilled into northern parts of Iraq and Syria,

prompting Türkiye to conduct military operations in these regions to curtail PKK threats and safeguard its borders (Xuewen, 2023).

These initiatives, like Operation in Iraq particularly in KRG, are motivated by a few important elements, one of the most important reasons is national security factor, since, Türkiye considers PKK's actions as a direct risk to the country's national security (Somer,2004). Therefore, Turkish government targets PKK presence in KRG to reduce cross-border attacks and improving its border security.

These operations had an impact on the Türkiye- Iraqi relations in various aspects including (diplomatic relation, security cooperation, and economic implications). According to (Kibaroglu,2005), Türkiye's military operations during this time have increased tensions between Ankara and Baghdad. The Iraqi government has denounced Türkiye's incursions as an infringement on its sovereignty, and lodged diplomatic protests and called on Türkiye to put a stop to its operations. Despite this, there were instances of security cooperation between Türkiye and Iraq, especially against terrorism. addressing PKK threats present a mutual interest for both sides. (Somer,2004).

In addition to military and diplomatic dimensions, on the one hand, the economic implications of Türkiye's operations on Iraq deserve consideration. While Türkiye is keen to protect its own borders and the dangers posed from the PKK, it has also identified the vast energy reserves held by Iraq, and particularly the Kirkuk Region, as vital not just for Turkish energy security, but also Turkish economic expansion and growth (Turunc, 2011).

On the other hand, the emergence of ISIS then brought forth a new threat that had a significant impact on Türkiye's national security. Türkiye was a crucial place for ISIS operations because of its proximity to both Syria and Iraq. It turned into a battleground and a transit point for ISIS militants traveling between

Türkiye and areas in Syria and Iraq under ISIS control. This made it harder for Türkiye to keep fighters under control and protect its borders from ISIS (Taşpınar, 2017).

Turkish policy allowed jihadist groups, such as ISIS, to use its territory as a logistical base for operations into Syria in the early years of the Syrian Civil War. The impact of ISIS on Türkiye's internal security can be seen when ISIS began attacking inside Türkiye and recruiting foreign militants from Türkiye, this change resulted in a major strategic blunder and had a big effect on Türkiye's security policy priorities (Uslu, 2016). ISIS's operations in Türkiye have led to a number of high-profile terrorist acts over the years, including the 2015 Süruç bombing and the 2016 Istanbul Airport attack, which claimed scores of lives and injured hundreds more. These acts have also highlighted the group's growing danger to domestic security (BBC News, 2016).

Likewise, the rise of ISIS posed significant challenges to Türkiye's counterterrorism approach. Although Turkish police and intelligence have made well-publicized attempts to raid and destroy other ISIS cells, the operations have frequently encountered political and logistical barriers, limiting their potential effectiveness (Sinai, 2022). The return of foreign fighters, radicalized and trained in territory held by the Islamic State, exacerbated Türkiye's internal security problems. These people raised violence on the local country and created significant dangers to both civilians and protection workers. As a result, Türkiye needed to adjust its counterterrorism policies and to enhance cooperation with international partners in order to fight the menace of ISIS (Yalçınkaya, 2024).

On the international level, ISIS's emergence has a major effect on Türkiye's foreign policy in addition to posing internal threats. As a NATO member, Türkiye participated in military operations against ISIS in Syria and Iraq, emerging as a major force in global counterterrorism efforts. These measures were not without

controversy, nevertheless, as Türkiye's relations with its Western partners were strained due to its prior backing of Islamist organizations in the Syrian conflict. As ISIS's operations crossed national boundaries, it became clear that international collaboration was necessary in order to fight the global jihadist network. Türkiye's battle against ISIS demonstrated the close ties between international terrorism and the necessity of a concerted international effort to successfully combat such threats (Uslu, 2016).

Overall, the PKK and ISIS, while different in their goals and tactics, have had a profound impact on Türkiye's internal and external national security. Both groups have led Türkiye to conduct military interventions in neighboring countries such as Iraq, Syria and implement counter-terrorism measures. Türkiye's security concerns have led it to manage delicate relations with regional and global powers. For example, PKK activities have strained Türkiye's relations with the United States, which has supported Kurdish groups in Syria, while ISIS has led to closer cooperation with NATO allies in counterterrorism operations.

Moreover, the PKK and ISIS have had significant political and social influence on Türkiye. Both groups have contributed to increase fears of terrorism and instability in the country, prompting the Turkish government to take tougher security measures. Türkiye's experience with both the PKK and ISIS underscores the need for a comprehensive security strategy that addresses both internal and external threats and at the same time ensure the protection of democratic values.

4. Türkiye's Military Strategies and Operations in Northern Iraq

Türkiye launched military operations in northern Iraq nominally aimed against the separatist PKK, a group that Ankara considers a terrorist organization. Located in the northern edge of Iraq and bordering Türkiye, Northern Iraq is more commonly referred to as Iraqi Kurdistan. Türkiye is conducting military operations in the region under the guise of the presence of the PKK in the region

to target PKK fighters, prevent such attacks across the border, and to safeguard its national security. Türkiye seeks to reshape the geopolitics of the region and protect its border from possible threats (Kermanj, 2013). The PKK historically have launched attacks through bases in northern Iraq, leading Türkiye to take preemptive measures to protect its national security. Moreover, these operations are aimed at combating a larger terrorist threat in the area, including its military actions against the PKK, its operations to counter ISIS and its larger effort to secure its borders. For one, Türkiye aims to redefine the geopolitics in the region, secure its borders against potential threats, and safeguard itself from the emergence of a Kurds entity that could inspire separatist movements within its territorial integrity (Park, 2005 and Katz, 2020; Hürriyet Daily News, 2021).

Türkiye's political and diplomatic efforts (soft efforts) to end tensions with the PKK should be discussed prior to discussing Türkiye's counter-strategies and military operations in Iraq. This process, also known as the 'Kurdish Peace Process' or the 'Peace Process in Türkiye, primarily aimed to end the long-running conflict between the Turkish government and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has demanded more autonomy and rights for the Kurdish population in Türkiye. The early 2010s saw a major increase in interest in the procedure. As the peace process progressed, it became clearer that resolving the war would entail addressing not only the political aspirations of the Kurdish population but also the socioeconomic inequalities and long-standing historical grievances that fueled the conflict (Özpek, 2017). Although the process was first seen with hope, it ultimately failed for a variety of internal and external Türkiye-related factors, such as:

First, Lack of Trust and Commitment: One of the most important barriers about the success of the negotiations was the lack of trust between the Turkish government and the PKK. According to (Andika & Hanura, 2023), both parties

lack belief toward each other, PKK questioned the good faith of the government in solving the Kurdish question, while the government was fearful of the PKK's growing demands.

Second, Domestic Political Dynamics — Perhaps most importantly, the political landscape in Türkiye, and the behaviors of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. After losing its parliamentary majority in 2015, the AKP entered a more authoritarian and homogenous configuration once again, engaging in political maneuvers to win the support of nationalists, leading to returning armed conflicts and undermining the peaceful process (Özpek & Mutluer, 2016).

Third, Regional and International Influences: The peace process was also influenced by regional dynamics, including Türkiye's relations with Kurdish groups in Syria and Iraq, and international developments such as the rise of ISIS and tensions with Russia. These factors made Türkiye's policy more elaborate and shaped its stance towards the Kurdish question (Özpek and Mutluer, 2016).

As a result of this process's failure, Türkiye improved its military capabilities, developed contemporary strategies, and conducted extensive military operations against the PKK and other threats between 2014 and 2024. Several military strategies are being implemented by Türkiye in its operations against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in northern Iraq including:

1: Cross-Border Operation: Türkiye is launching a bottom-drag military incursion against PKK bases in northern Iraq from its own borders. They target the PKK's capacity to launch strikes in Türkiye and serve national security. The move seeks not only to disrupt PKK activities but also to create a cooperative framework that responds to core security concerns in the region. The dynamics of escalation have resulted in an interrelated relationship between Türkiye and the KRG, as economic relations have increased side by side with military

cooperation against common threats, including the PKK (Sonmez and Kurban, 2017). This increasingly militarized strategy also runs the risk of sidelining political solutions, which are necessary for future stability and reconciliation within Iraq's polarized ethnic landscape. So, while Türkiye's short-term goals may be aimed at military victory, it is evident that there is an urgent need for a well-balanced strategy that encompasses diplomatic engagement and dialogue with local partners to mitigate the broader implications of its initiatives (Cevik, n.d). Regarding the continuation of the operations the current president of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said: *"We will continue our operations until the last terrorist is neutralized. Our fight against the PKK is unwavering, and we will not allow any threats to our national security."* (Hürriyet Daily News, 2021).

2: Intelligence Sharing: With intelligence sharing agreements with allied nations, Türkiye increases its effectiveness on the battlefield. This joint effort assists in obtaining essential intelligence on PKK movements and activities, enabling more precise and targeted offensive operations. In this regard, the former foreign Minister of Türkiye, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said: *"We are committed to cooperation with our regional partners to combat terrorism. The PKK is not just a threat to Türkiye; it poses a danger to the entire region."* (Katz, 2020). Additionally, Türkiye's military operations into northern Iraq have increasingly converged with the overall geopolitical strategy, particularly following the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the US. This change has increased Türkiye's fear of secession by its Kurdish population, and has also been reflected in the reorientation of Turkish policy toward regional players like the KRG in northern Iraq (Sonmez, and Kurban, 2017), nevertheless Türkiye maintains economic relations with KRG, hoping to materialize cooperation to overcome the threat of terrorism (Dempsey, 2018). Yet this two-headed approach has drawn criticism for its long-term viability, arguing that even military success cannot impose security without

addressing the political grievances that have galvanized support for insurgents over time, hinting at some of the complexities that may lie ahead in the region. Dialogue with the local political and (perhaps even military leadership) is not only more palatable option for Türkiye, but it is a necessary step, Potential for a stable coexistence between Turks and Kurds may lie in Kurds' demands for autonomy or self-leadership, which would be advantageous to Türkiye (Cevik, n.d).

3: Use of Drones: Türkiye has made increasing use of these unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for reconnaissance strikes on PKK targets and has been able to strike with a lower risk to its personnel while obtaining a strategic advantage in the region (Erendor, 2024). Türkiye does not rely solely on surveillance satellites for information on PKK operations, to monitor the movements of the PKK, everything from drones to spy planes equipped with advanced technology is used. Together, this ongoing intelligence cycle aids the planning and execution of military operations. Such a comprehensive perspective not only increases situational awareness, but also enables timely reactions to potential threats, leading to an improvement in the effectiveness of Türkiye's PKK counter insurgency activities (Yildiz, and Breau, 2010).

4: Ground Attacks and Establishing Military Bases: Similar to air strategies, Türkiye does ground operations and has built numerous military bases that have become operational centers for its military efforts. The presence of these bases enables the military to maintain a long-term presence with the ability of rapid deployment of troops if necessary, involving special forces trained to directly engage with the PKK fighters in difficult terrain (Turunc, 2011). Regarding this, Defense Minister of Türkiye, Hulusi Akar (2018-2023), said "*Our military presence in northern Iraq is essential for both our national security and regional stability. We are determined to eliminate PKK threats at their source.*"

(U.S. Department of Defense, 2019). In addition, Türkiye's military operations have ramifications that transcend its borders, calling into question its contribution to regional equilibrium and the rule of international law. Although Türkiye maintains that it is exercising its right to protect itself from PKK action, it has been criticized for the legality of its across-border activity according to modern international standards, a stance that will make it harder for Türkiye to have comprehensive diplomatic relations with Iraq and possibly other countries focused on sovereignty concerns (Keskin, 2008), also, Ongoing military campaigns may also inadvertently exacerbate tensions within Kurdish communities both in Türkiye and across the region, as they could be perceived as oppressive measures rather than legitimate security efforts.(Cevik, n.d).

5: Public Message and Political Justification: Türkiye aims to legitimize its military action domestically and internationally through strategic relations, portraying them as protecting national security and regional stability. This narrative serves to rally public support and minimize backlash to its operation (Keskin, 2008).

These all constitute the fundamental strategies used by Türkiye to curb the PKK threats in Northern Iraq, between 2014 and 2024. The following are the most important operations in which the strategic perspectives would be observed in Iraq:

First, Operation Ceng (2019): In May 2019, Türkiye started its operation called “Ceng” whose intention was to destroy the PKK bases located in the Hakurk area of northern Iraq. The operation included cross-border air strikes and ground operations, with advanced surveillance and reconnaissance technologies. Turkish Special Operations Forces were instrumental in the targeting of PKK leadership and infrastructure. The operation was presented as a security

imperative to disrupt the PKK's operations and attacks on Turkish soil (Pusane, 2016).

Second, Operation Tiger's Claw (2020): Building on the earlier operation's successes, Türkiye launched Operation Tiger's Claw in June 2020 targeting PKK-held areas in northern Iraq. It included massive air bombardment, backed up by ground forces to confront PKK fighters directly. In a statement, the Turkish Interior Ministry stated that "Under the operation, drones would be used in vigilance and precision strikes and added that Türkiye would conduct operations with a little risk to its personnel and try to make the PKK unable to operate". Despite Türkiye's aim to target PKK members through its cross-border operations, the armed conflict has not only damaged Türkiye's relations with its neighboring country like, Iraq, but also raised concerns of world powers on the legality of its cross-border actions (Keskin, 2008).

Third, Operation Claw-Lock (2022): The operation was held in April 2022 that Türkiye had started, called "Operations Claw-Lock". A combination of air and ground assaults aimed primarily at taking out top PKK figures and undermining their supply lines. The operation was also intended to form a buffer zone along the border that would increase Türkiye's security. Moreover, although Türkiye's military successes against the PKK have been significant, they may result in an escalation of which will compel the PKK to overcome its losses and may even strengthen its resolve, perpetuating the cycle of violence rather than leading to a sustainable peace. Nevertheless, the resilience of cooperation among diverse factions and the need for regional actors like Türkiye to enter through an effective dialogue with Kurdish and local leaders is paramount to avoiding such chaotic conditions (Pusane, 2016).

Fourth and Last Operation "Ceng-3 (2023)": Facing ongoing attacks from the PKK, Türkiye initiated Operation Ceng-3 in early 2023, which further

extended Türkiye's military presence in northern Iraq to develop the capability of the PKK by coordinated airstrikes. Download The operation also involved intelligence sharing with local forces to bolster counterterrorism efforts (Keskin, 2008).

In response to Türkiye's military operations, the PKK have said, Türkiye's military presence aggravates tensions and conflict, calling on the international community to intervene. They argue that military operations cannot solve the problem and call for reforms in political and social spheres, the resolution of grievances raised by the Kurds, such as cultural autonomy, political representation...etc. This wider fight for Kurdish identity influences decades of resentment against oppressive state politics in Türkiye and Iraq (Jongerden, 2001). The PKK points to structural problems such as political and economic marginalization as well as cultural repression as having given rise to insurgent movements. This absence of real dialogue and the commitment of the Turkish government to acknowledge the rights of Kurds will encourage the cycles of violence and instability and will further complicate international relations (Unal, 2012).

On the other hand, Türkiye has adopted a multifaceted approach to counter ISIS in Northern Iraq, centering its efforts on military operations, border security, and regional collaboration. Türkiye had acknowledged the threat after the emergence of ISIS, the group, who didn't only see it as a threat to its national security but also a threat to regional stability. Establishing military bases in northern Iraq is one of the mainframes of Turkish strategy as it directly monitors and counters the activities of ISIS (Katz, 2020).

Türkiye has engaged not only in military presence but in the implementation of several cross-border operations, including Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch, with the objective of eradicating ISIS strongholds and

preventing the expansion of Kurdish forces, which Türkiye perceives as a terrorism threat based on their links to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party)). These operations served not only to counter ISIS but also to protect Turkmans in Iraq and to assert Turkish influence in the region (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019).

Türkiye's operations were also motivated by a desire to secure its borders and control the flow of refugees and jihadist fighters. First and foremost, Türkiye seeks to make sure that ISIS does not return and that the region is not threatened by cross-border terrorist attacks (Hürriyet Daily News, 2021).

In general, after the failure of the peace process (soft effort), to resolve the Kurdish question, Türkiye's military undertakings in the northern part of Iraq strive to suit multidimensional security necessities, to neutralize PKK-linked apprehensions, to confront ISIS, and to protect Türkiye's borders. Türkiye employed these tools, including cross-border strikes, intelligence operations, drone warfare and the building of military bases, as part of its national security policy and regional stability. Yet, although these measures have provided tactical gains, they also threaten to put a strain on Türkiye's diplomatic relationship with neighboring countries, as well as international actors. Furthermore, a sustainable resolution to the conflict must also involve acknowledging the Kurds' legitimate grievances and ensuring their inclusion in the political process through fair representation and autonomy, as well as by pursuing regional stability through collaboration with neighboring countries. In the absence of such a broad-based strategy, the cycle of violence and endemic regional instability will most likely continue to perpetuate itself.

4.1 The Role of Intelligence and Drone Technology in Türkiye's Counterterrorism and Impacts on Regional Security Dynamics

Türkiye's strategic approach to regional security has been profoundly altered by the use of drone and intelligence technologies into its counterterrorism operations. In the last ten years, Türkiye has transformed its counterterrorism operations both at its borders and internationally by enhancing its military capabilities, mainly through the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and modern intelligence systems. Beyond tactical improvements, these technologies have an impact on military operations and larger geopolitical forces. Türkiye has strengthened its position as a significant regional and international actor and improved its operational efficiency by integrating drones and advanced intelligence platforms into its counterterrorism strategy (Walsh, 2013).

The following section explores the use of drones and intelligence in Türkiye's counterterrorism efforts and the ensuing effects on regional security, emphasizing military effectiveness, geopolitical influence, economic considerations, and ethical challenges.

First, Intelligence and drone technology have given Türkiye the means to plan more precise, real-time, and effective counterterrorism operations within its borders and beyond, including Iraq. One of the key pillars of this transformation is Türkiye's use of UAVs for real-time intelligence gathering. These systems enable the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) to engage in surveillance, intercept communication, and generate both Electronic Intelligence (ELINT) and Signal Intelligence (SIGINT), which generates vital data assisting decision-making processes. An example of this is the drones that have been deployed along the Türkiye-Iraq border, which have greatly increased the detection of terrorist movements, allowing for rapid and targeted interventions (Daricili, 2022).

Additionally, the operational deployment of advanced platforms like the TCG Ufuk, Türkiye's first national intelligence ship, has also enhanced the country's

technical intelligence capabilities. It enables intelligence collection, analysis, and dissemination that enhances Türkiye's overall counterterrorism ecosystem while improving the conduct of military operations (Daricili, 2022). Remotely Piloted Aerial Vehicles (RPAS), particularly with advanced sensor capabilities, have shown significant value for surveillance, targeting, and intelligence verification, especially in remote and challenging environments where more traditional intelligence-gathering methods may not work (Sen, 2015). Moreover, advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) have been integrated into these drones, resulting in systems that can be more autonomous and adaptive, allowing them to react and adapt in real-time to changing combat scenarios. Integrating AI into UAV functionality significantly improves the targeting arsenal of Türkiye and the ability to carry out operations with a high degree of precision while minimizing unintended damage (Radovanovic, et al., 2024).

In addition to this, Türkiye's emphasis on biometric measures, especially, facial recognition systems, has further complemented counterterrorism measures from a proactive standpoint. With the help of facial recognition developed for drones, the identification and neutralization of valuable targets is possible, more in dense urban landscapes where people can camouflage among groups. This ability is particularly important for the fight against terrorist cells situated in urban areas. Türkiye has made its counterterrorism operations much more efficient and effective as a result of such advancements and the widespread use of drones in tandem with ground operations that ensued (Balint, 2018).

Second, The role of intelligence and drone technology in shaping regional security dynamics, intelligence and drone technology are shaping and resettling regional security dynamics to a much larger extent than the territory of Türkiye. Türkiye's hardened counterterrorism capabilities have changed the security environment in the Middle East— By employing drones in its military

interventions, including those in Iraq and Syria, it strengthened its reputation as a militarily powerful country able to maintain strategic goals with low cost. Türkiye's effective actions across these combat zones, particularly by using drones for precise strikes and intelligence, have shifted power dynamics in the region and have empowered Türkiye contribute more in these geopolitical areas (Hwang and Song, 2022).

Also, Türkiye's emergence as a major global player in the drone market has also lifted its geopolitical relevance. Türkiye has not only developed advanced drone technology for its own domestic use, but has also made itself an exporter of these systems. Since then other countries, notably in the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe, have turned to Turkish drones, showcasing the combat effectiveness and reliability of this technology. This didn't only improve Türkiye's economic position, but it also expanded its political leverage, paving the way for new alliances while improving its strategic autonomy (Rossiter and Cannon, 2022).

However, Türkiye's increasing reliance on drones has also presented serious impediments. Drones, although augmenting Türkiye's military strength, have compounded international diplomatic tensions—especially with Russia, NATO and other regional players who see Türkiye's growing military assertiveness as a disruptive element (Demiryol and Soyaltın, 2024). The sale of drones has alarmed Western nations, all of whom regard Türkiye's export of drones as a potential source of destabilization. In addition, the moral and legal ramifications of drone warfare are still hot topic. Some critics say drone strikes lead to the killing of numerous civilians and violate international humanitarian law. Consequently, the international community has demanded increased regulation of drone technology to reduce the risk of misuse and escalation in conflicts (García, 2022).

In summary, Türkiye's combined intelligence and drone technology has drastically changed its counterterrorism campaign, making it more effective on a military scale and shifting the tectonics of the regional stage. The latter have allowed Türkiye to carry out far more accurate, efficient, effective and targeted counterterrorism operations, bolstering the country's status as a regional power. Additionally, Türkiye's rise as a top drone exporter has amplified its geopolitical clout, enshrining itself as a major force in global defense markets. But it also poses challenges for military planners, with diplomatic, ethical, and legal questions around the use of drones in combat. Finally, while Türkiye continues its policy, it is important for Türkiye to consider the ethical and legal implications of using and selling drones. It should also pay attention to its relations with regional and international actors.

5. Regional and International Concerns to Türkiye Military Operations in Iraq

On an international level, countries such as the United States, regional powers like Iran, non-state actors like the (KRG, international institutions like the United Nations (UN), and international law have all responded differently to Türkiye's military involvement in Iraq.

These responses signify a multifaceted intersection of geopolitical interests, security imperatives, and legal frameworks, thereby complicating the execution of military operations in accordance with international law. Central to this dilemma is Türkiye's ambition to confront the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which raises significant issues regarding sovereignty, the evolving regional power balance, and the legitimacy of unilateral military interventions. scholars like Kardaş (2021), have examined how Türkiye's military operations, particularly within Iraq, have challenged its relations with neighboring states, notably Iran, while failing to modify the overarching regional dynamics.

This study is organized into two separate parts. By evaluating their political declarations, diplomatic positions, and potential ramifications for wider geopolitical connections. The first focuses on the responses of regional and global actors. The second part examines Iraq and the Kurdistan Region separately, analyzing their particular viewpoints and reactions.

5.1 Multilevel Responses to Türkiye Military Operations in Iraq: "Regional, Global, and Legal Perspectives"

From a regional standpoint, Iran's larger geopolitical goals have shaped its reaction to Türkiye's military actions in Iraq. Iran, a major force in Iraqi politics and security, considers Türkiye's actions, especially those against the PKK, as a challenge to its hegemony. This is particularly important in regions where Iran uses its logistical routes and proxies to uphold strategic goals. Tehran is concerned that Türkiye's growing military would impede its land access to Syria and reduce its influence over the Baghdad-based central authority. Iran has responded to the ramifications of Türkiye's ambitions diplomatically, especially by holding discussions with Iraqi officials. Furthermore, Iran uses its partnerships with regional militias to offset Türkiye's influence. The larger regional rivalry between Iran and Türkiye is highlighted by this proxy war, in which both countries aim to establish their influence without engaging in direct conflict. Iran's principal priorities include safeguarding its sphere of influence in Iraq and preserving strategic power in the area, even though it officially frames its objections to Türkiye's operations around grounds of sovereignty and territorial integrity (Elias, 2024).

Similarly, the US has reacted diplomatically and cautiously, striking a balance between its support for Iraqi sovereignty and its alliance with Türkiye. Washington has stressed the need to protect Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity, even as it respects Türkiye's security concerns, especially with regard

to the PKK (Müftüler-Baç, 2005). This stance supports the larger U.S. policy objectives of preserving Iraqi stability and avoiding regional tensions from rising as a result of counterterrorism activities (Gamawa, 2014). In support of multilateral responses to security challenges, Washington has urged Türkiye to coordinate its military operations with the KRG and the Iraqi government (Müftüler-Baç, 2005).

According to Müftüler-Baç (2005), the United States acknowledges that any unilateral military intervention might threaten the delicate balance in Iraq, where many ethnic groups, including the Kurds, have their own aspirations for autonomy. America's efforts to uphold Iraq's sovereignty and maintain its strategic partnership with Türkiye are reflected in this cautious balance (Gamawa, 2014). Moreover, Washington continues to be wary of possible instability in Northern Iraq, as it fears that uncontrolled military actions may give extremist groups like ISIS the chance to take advantage of the disarray in the area and regain influence. This diplomatic strategy highlights the United States' efforts to manage the complex dynamics in the area, striking a balance between the interests of important parties and averting possible confrontations (Kay and Yaphe, 1997).

Furthermore, about the UN's Response to Türkiye's Military Actions in Iraq, Iraq has complained to the UN on several occasions, claiming that Türkiye had invaded its territory without permission. Repeating that these actions violate Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which protects state sovereignty and prohibits the use of force, Iraqi officials have called on the UN Security Council to hold Türkiye responsible (United Nations, 1945). Despite the UN's repeated emphasis on the importance of upholding Iraq's sovereignty, geopolitical complexity including, veto power, internal political instability in Iraq, lack of military and fund, are all limit UNs ability to execute its resolutions (Dadashova, 2020).

In contrast, Türkiye uses Article 51 of the UN Charter to defend its military activities against the PKK, which states that it is a direct danger to its national security and operates from bases in Northern Iraq. This defense is still controversial, though, since it calls into question whether the PKK's actions amount to an armed attack that calls for cross-border military intervention. In resolving this conflict, the UN has to find a balance between security considerations in a politically delicate area and state sovereignty principles (United Nations, 1945).

Lastly, Türkiye's military actions in Iraq raise significant questions about state sovereignty and the prohibition on the use of force from an international legal perspective. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter and customary international law both prohibit governments from employing force against the territorial integrity of another state unless it is necessary for self-defense or has been approved by the host state (United Nations, 1945). Türkiye argues that the PKK represents an immediate threat because of cross-border attacks, and that its actions are legitimate acts of self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter. **Nonetheless**, Türkiye must show that the threat is urgent, that its response is appropriate and essential, and that all non-military measures have been tried before self-defense may be legally justified. Türkiye's argument is further complicated by the issue of whether Iraq is "unwilling or unable" to neutralize the PKK, since this hypothesis is still debatable in international law (Ruys, 2008). Furthermore, since international law often needs host-state acceptance for foreign military interventions, the legitimacy of Türkiye's intrusions is called into question due to Iraq's lack of explicit consent. The legal threshold for self-defense is still up for debate, therefore even while Türkiye claims that its operations are defensive, its activities in Iraq are under scrutiny under international legal rules (Ruys, 2008).

In conclusion, Türkiye's military actions in Iraq still present serious regional, political, and legal issues. Türkiye's actions raise serious concerns about sovereignty and the use of force under international law, even though it defends them as self-defense against the PKK. The wider geopolitical ramifications of Türkiye's invasions are reflected in the reactions of regional powers like Iran, international players like the United States, and organizations like the UN. While the United States has tried to strike a compromise between its alliance with Türkiye and its dedication to Iraq's sovereignty, Iran's opposition is motivated by strategic considerations.

The UN has emphasized the value of maintaining territorial integrity, although its ability to do so is still limited. In the end, the political and legal complexities of Türkiye's actions underscore the challenges of striking a balance between international legal norms and national security considerations. In order to resolve these lingering issues and stop any regional instability, diplomatic involvement and adherence to international law will be essential moving forward.

5.2 Iraq and the KRG's Responses to Türkiye's Military Operations

Iraq has repeatedly voiced its opposition to Türkiye's military interventions in its northern areas, specifically in regions controlled by the KRG. These military actions, which Türkiye rationalizes as essential countermeasures against the PKK, have engendered apprehensions concerning Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Ruys, 2008; Keskin, 2008). The PKK, which is classified as a terrorist organization by the Turkish state, has utilized northern Iraq as a launchpad for conducting attacks, thereby eliciting recurrent Turkish military interventions (Ruys, 2008). Nevertheless, Iraq perceives these military operations as infringements upon its sovereignty and has endeavored to contest them via diplomatic means, including petitions to the United Nations Security Council (Keskin, 2008; Anon, 2024).

Türkiye's military engagement in Iraq transcends the mere objective of countering the PKK; it is also influenced by more extensive geopolitical factors. Türkiye seeks to assert its influence over the Kurdish demographic in Northern Iraq while also protecting the Turkmen minority, a group that shares historical and cultural connections with Türkiye (Migdalovitz, 2002). Furthermore, Türkiye perceives its military installations in Iraq as integral to its national security framework, facilitating ongoing operations against the PKK and thwarting the advancement of Kurdish separatist movements (Migdalovitz, 2002). These strategic aims fortify Türkiye's determination to sustain a military presence, notwithstanding Iraq's objections.

Despite the diplomatic initiatives undertaken by Iraq, it has encountered significant challenges in securing substantial international backing to mitigate the Turkish military presence. The Iraqi government has officially denounced these military incursions; however, its constrained military capabilities and prevailing internal instability have obstructed the implementation of effective countermeasures (Keskin, 2008). Although Baghdad has pursued international intervention, particularly through mechanisms such as the United Nations, Western powers have predominantly upheld strategic affiliations with Türkiye, a member of NATO, thereby diminishing Iraq's negotiating power (Anon, 2024). As a result, Iraq finds itself in a vulnerable situation, lacking the means to effectively thwart Turkish operations within its northern regions.

The complexities of Iraq's response are intensified by the internal political relations between the central government of Iraq and the KRG. While Baghdad has adopted a resolute position opposing Turkish military operations, the KRG has frequently fostered collaborative relations with Ankara (Chomani and Jasim, 2022). This bilateral relationship is driven by economic and strategic imperatives, given that the KRG relies on Türkiye for trade and oil exports. The KRG's

alignment with Türkiye has, on several occasions, undermined Baghdad's diplomatic initiatives, thereby further complicating Iraq's capacity to effectively respond to Turkish military interventions. Moreover, the differences in perspectives between the Iraqi administration and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have led to a fragmented national stance, consequently hindering Iraq's overall capability to address the intrusions. (Chomani and Jasim, 2022).

Iraq's military deficiencies further inhibit its capacity to respond effectively to Turkish incursions. The existence of armed factions, persistent hostilities with the vestiges of the ISIS, and internal political turmoil significantly undermine Iraq's ability to protect its territorial integrity (Park, 2008). Moreover, Iraq is devoid of cohesive international support to contest Türkiye's actions, as numerous Western nations prioritize their strategic alliances with Ankara over the sovereignty issues faced by Iraq (Keskin, 2008). Consequently, Iraq's responses have predominantly remained diplomatic in nature, with minimal capability for direct military engagement or substantial deterrent measures.

The KRG, which views Turkish military actions inside its borders as violations of Iraqi sovereignty and risks to regional stability, has continuously voiced its worries about them.

The Iraqi federal government was urged to act immediately to stop Turkish military operations in the Kurdistan Region by the KRG's Ministry of Peshmerga in June 2021. Additionally, the ministry urged the PKK to move their struggle away from Kurdish homes and lands and respect the KRG's sovereignty (KRG Peshmerga Ministry, 2021). These operations have also caused internal problems for the KRG. For example, three people were killed in a Turkish drone strike near Sulaimaniya in August 2024. KRG's former Deputy Prime Minister, Qubad Talabani, following the accident, revealed that two of the victims were journalists.

Talabani denounced the strike as unjustified and a violation of both Iraqi sovereignty and international law (Reuters, 2024). The KRG has frequently restricted its efforts to diplomatic protests and requests for negotiation in order to balance its relationship with Türkiye and address local issues. KRG leaders have underlined that rather than using unilateral military actions to address its security concerns, Türkiye must work with Iraqi authorities. Furthermore, KRG tries to protect its various relationships including economic with Türkiye and defending its own territorial interests (Jamestown Foundation, 2008).

In summary, both the KRG and Iraq strongly oppose Türkiye's military actions in Northern Iraq; nonetheless, there are significant differences in their reactions. The central government of Iraq believes that its sovereignty has been violated by these military operations. Through diplomatic avenues like the UN, it has attempted to get international supporting and denounced Türkiye's intrusions. But Iraq's own political instability, military weakness, and the reality that many Western nations back Türkiye because it is a NATO partner have all hindered its attempts. Because of this, Iraq finds it challenging to take decisive action against Türkiye. However, the KRG's stance is more complex, even if it opposes Türkiye's military actions. Through commerce and oil exports, the KRG maintains strong strategic and economic relations with Türkiye. The KRG adopts a more cautious approach as a result. While denouncing Türkiye's activities, it still aims to keep up a cooperative partnership with Ankara.

5.3 The Role and Challenges of Kurdistan Regional Government in Türkiye's Counterterrorism Strategy

The KRG plays a pivotal role in Türkiye's overall counterterrorism strategy, especially in terms of countering the perennial threat of the PKK. This partnership developed through a mix of military cooperation, economic interdependence and political engagement over the decades.

A. Military Cooperation and Intelligence Sharing

Türkiye's antiterrorism campaign has increasingly ramped up in northern Iraq, where the PKK has bases. In this climate, the KRG has become an essential partner. This collaboration would enable Türkiye to set military bases and further its operations against PKK elements in KRG administered grounds. Above all, because of their intimate knowledge of the region's topography and the PKK's methods, the KRG's Peshmerga forces have been fighting alongside Turkish forces, often delivering invaluable assistance in their own right. Turkish operations have, at times, cleared areas of PKK presence, resulting in Peshmerga-aligned security forces taking responsibility for those areas and preventing a resurgence of terrorist footholds (Mandiraci, 2022).

Moreover, statements from KRG leadership strengthen its commitments against the PKK. Prime Minister Masrour Barzani has openly declared that "Türkiye is fighting against the PKK, not against us". The war is driven by the existence of PKK. Barzani has pointed towards PKK's troubled contribution to disruption in the region, such as extortion, inhibiting locals' access to villages and fields and even kidnapping of youth, and stressing on the aspects which threatens the peace and stability in the region (Karaalp, 2024).

B. Economic Interdependence as a Stabilizing Factor

The KRG shares a symbiotic economic relationship with Türkiye which greatly bolsters their counterterrorism cooperation. Bilateral trade between Türkiye and Iraq amounted to almost \$20 billion in 2020, with about 70% of that involving the KRG. This vibrant economic partnership encompasses approximately 1500 Turkish enterprises functioning inside the KRG, with major participation in vital sectors including construction, infrastructure and energy. In addition, since KRG needs Türkiye to secure oil exports, pipelines have carried about 450,000 bpd of oil to Türkiye's Ceyhan port. Not only does such economic

interdependence promote regional development, but it is also strategic leverage, aligning the KRG's interests with Türkiye's counterterrorism agenda (Mandiraci, 2022).

C. Political Engagement and Regional Stability

The KRG is not just a military and economic partner for Türkiye in its counterterrorism strategy, but also a high-level political partner. Türkiye has hosted thousands of KRG officials and diplomats over the last two decades and has established close ties with KRG leadership. For instance, during President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Iraq in April 2024, meetings with both Iraqi central government officials and KRG leaders highlighted a shared determination to eliminate the PKK threat. According to Erdoğan, it is apparent that terrorism must be eradicated in order to secure Türkiye's as well as Iraq's sovereignty and development and in order to protect international investments (Sabah, 2024).

Lastly, the KRG is also active on the counterterrorism front within the region in its fight against the PKK. The KRG has sent Peshmerga forces to block the PKK from entrenching itself in new territories, thus limiting the group's ability to carry out attacks on Türkiye. This initiative indicates the KRG's recognition that the activities of the PKK endanger regional stability and weigh heavily on its vital economic and political relations with Türkiye. As both KRG President Nechirvan Barzani and Prime Minister Masrour Barzani have made clear on numerous occasions, the KRG wishes for the PKK to cease its activity on KRG territory and to stop utilizing that territory to launch attacks against Türkiye. For the KRG, Türkiye is not just an ally; it is a crucial one, especially economically. For Erbil to remain an economic boon for the region's Iraqi Kurds, Erbil needs the oil pipeline to Türkiye's Ceyhan port as well as Türkiye's infrastructure investments (Özkizilcik, 2022).

Indeed, there are significant obstacles for the KRG in Iraq to fully cooperate with Türkiye's counterterrorism strategy, especially as it relates to the PKK; including: PKK and the KRG: A Complicated Relationship, Limited Geographic and Military Options, Political and Diplomatic challenges, Economic dependencies, and regional dynamics.

The KRG has a complicated presence with the PKK. The KRG officially denounces the PKK's militant activity, but the group operates in the mountains of Northern Iraq, areas under KRG authority. This leaves the KRG to balance internal Kurdish conflict with pressure from Türkiye over PKK activity on its territory. Türkiye's frustration over this PKK presence in the KRG is further exacerbated by the KRG's perceived leniency towards the PKK, lead to Türkiye pushing KRG towards a more definitive stance towards eliminating the group's presence in the area (Okuducu, 2024).

Also, the geographical terrain of Northern Iraq makes it extremely difficult for the KRG to fight against the PKK. The mountainous terrain also offers natural sanctuaries for PKK fighters, making military operations arduous and costly. Due to the military refuge of the PKK in Northern Iraq, the KRG lacks military capabilities and assets to carry out significant operations against PKK without an external support. But this very limitation has contributed to tensions with Türkiye, which has recently carried out cross-border military operations against PKK positions in northern Iraq, had often been conducted without prior KRG agreement (Duman, 2016).

Internally, the KRG is politically divided on whether to work with the PKK or not as well. And although leadership within the KRG officially opposes the PKK and its activities, there are elements of the Kurdish population in Iraq who sympathize with the PKK's cause, as they see it as a fight for Kurds' rights and autonomy. This internally plagued stance puts the KRG in a complicated position

where any harsh action against the PKK will 'drive a wedge in a large part of the KRG's base and they would risk fragmenting the region and be unable to form a stable government (if they are) not careful' (CRS, 2025).

Economically, the region's economy relies heavily on Türkiye for trade, especially energy exports. Kurdish oil and gas also constitute an important market for Türkiye, and the KRG uses this economic relationship as a means for fiscal sustainability. Türkiye's dependence on the KRG's oil is economically indispensable for both parties but throws the KRG further into an untenable position when Türkiye demands action against the PKK that goes against their own economic interests. KRG needs to juggle its economy with Türkiye and at the same time work to not worsen the internal context and controlled and practiced with PKK (Michalski, 2024).

Lastly, The KRG's position is also complicated by the wider regional dynamic. Türkiye's approach to counterterrorism is influenced by its relations with Iranian and Syrian neighbors. The KRG must balance its proportional ties to Türkiye against these regional powers. For instance, Türkiye sometimes starts military action in Northern Iraq without informing the KRG leading to tensions and complicating the KRG's ability to balance its regional partners (Ozcelik, 2024).

In conclusion, the KRG is a critical player in Türkiye's counterterrorism agenda targeting the PKK. Via military cooperation, intelligence sharing and economic ties, the KRG also serves to support Turkish operations and security. But the KRG has been challenged by the PKK's presence in its mountainous regions, limited military resources and internal political divisions. Türkiye's economic dominance, coupled with socioeconomic local pressures in the KRG, are additional tools that Türkiye uses to apply pressure as the KRG balances its relationship with Türkiye and the socioeconomic dynamic with local constituents.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the KRG's cooperation is key for regional stability and ongoing counterterrorism efforts.

5.3.1 Bilateral Security Agreements and Their Impact in Counting PKK Threats

Over the last ten years, Türkiye and Iraq have taken major steps to strengthen their anti-PKK security cooperation. For example, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Baghdad in April 2024, Marking his first visit in 13 years. This trip concluded with the signing of 26 bilateral agreements across different fields, including, particularly, defense and security. These agreements highlighted a shared dedication to fighting the PKK and radical groups that jeopardize regional stability (Cagaptay. et al., 2024).

Building on this, in August 2024 Türkiye and Iraq signed a memo of understanding related to military, security, and counter-terrorism cooperation. The agreement resulted in the formation of a Joint Security Coordination Centre in Baghdad and a Joint Training and Cooperation Centre in Bashika. They do this by fostering real-time intelligence sharing, coordinating military operations, and enabling joint training exercises, which improves both nations' PKK operational capabilities (Reuters, 2024).

In addition, the impact of the bilateral security agreements is not just limited to security but also economically, especially affecting energy infrastructure. The export of oil from the Kurdistan Region is one of the main sources of income for Iraq, as it is closely related to security issues. Türkiye halted oil exports through the Kurdistan Region' pipelines in March 2023 after Ankara agreed to pay Baghdad \$1.5 billion to settle an arbitration ruling over unlicensed exports between 2014 and 2018 (Rashid and Edwards, 2023).

This pause underscored how intertwined the security agreements were with economic interests. In particular, when oil exports resumed thanks to improved relations between Türkiye and Iraq in February 2025, the economic pressure was alleviated on the Kurdistan Region, illustrating the benefits of security cooperation in sustaining a stable energy infrastructure (Rashid, 2025).

Meanwhile, the scaled-up security cooperation between Türkiye and Iraq have drawn mixed reactions from regional actors. Iran, which shares borders with both countries and has some degree of influence all over Iraq, is watching the developments. Although it opposes the PKK, on the one hand, Iran is worried about Türkiye's expanding military foothold in Iraq and considers it a potential violation of its sphere of influence. On the other hand, Syria, which has been dealing with its own internal crisis as well as hosting PKK-related groups, looks at Türkiye-Iraq partnerships with a sense of nervousness, fearing that spillover effects would affect its territory. Initially, Western powers, namely the USA, through Secretary of State, offered limited support but only with a caveat of making sure they are not there as an occupying force, with respecting Iraq's sovereignty (F.K., 2024).

Conversely, these bilateral arrangements show mixed results. On the other hand, they have enhanced cooperation, which had performed well in combating the PKK together. Türkiye's April 2022 Operation Claw-Lock against PKK positions in Northern Iraq is one example of a military operation conducted with the assistance of intelligence sharing through these agreements (International Crisis Group, 2024).

At the same time, while military actions have been one of the priorities of Türkiye and Iraq in their operations against the PKK, there is growing rhetoric about the effectiveness of diplomatic means. Engaging in political dialogues with Kurdish representatives, addressing underlying socio-economic grievances, and

promoting inclusive governance are all potential avenues for undermining the PKK's appeal. Example: In December 2024, Turkish authorities allowed members of the pro-Kurdish DEM Party to conduct face-to-face meetings with the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, indicating a potential new phase in peace negotiations (Reuters, 2024).

Furthermore, using existing regional mechanisms like the Arab League or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), there could be an emphasis for non-military solutions rather than confrontation, and encourage the Arab world to be part of the solution. Türkiye was re-invited to the Arab League ministerial meeting—after a 13-year absence in September 2024—an important step to seek harmony for security issues with regional actors (Reuters, 2024).

In conclusion, the Turkish-Iraqi bilateral security agreements between 2014-2024 have proven to be pivotal in combating PKK threats and in promoting regional stability. These agreements have laid the foundations of key institutions pertaining to the sharing of intelligence, military coordination and joint exercises providing both nations with powerful operational capabilities. Although security cooperation has degraded PKK capabilities and contributed to economic recovery most notably in energy exports. The response of the regional powers Iran and Syria, as well as Western powers, underscored the geopolitical sensitivities surrounding Türkiye's military footprint in Iraq. However, while counterinsurgency efforts have seen success, military emphasis should not eliminate diplomatic solutions that target the basis of the PKK's rebellion. A longer-term strategy could involve greater engagement with Kurdish representatives and the pursuit of regional platforms for political dialogue in addition to military action.

Conclusion

The security concerns, strategic ramifications, and policy responses of Turkey in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region between 2014 and 2024 were investigated in this study. Key findings show that a combination of changing regional dynamics, including increasing instability and the involvement of regional and international actors like Iran and the United States, as well as ongoing security threats, especially from the PKK and ISIS, drove Turkey's changing strategy.

One of the main findings of this study is the strategic shift toward a multifaceted strategy that incorporates institutional, political, and military instruments, particularly bilateral security agreements and cross-border operations. By taking these steps, Turkey is attempting to keep control over Iraqi affairs while externalizing its domestic security threats. The study also discovered that although the creation of joint coordination centers and other bilateral security cooperation has expanded Turkey's operational reach against the PKK, it has also led to disputes over regional stability and sovereignty.

This study's examination of the KRG dual role—as a collaborator in counterterrorism and as a limited player because of its internal divisions and economic dependencies—is another significant contribution. By challenging oversimplified assumptions, this nuanced perspective on the KRG advances our knowledge of sub-state processes in regional security cooperation.

Crucially, the study adds to the body of knowledge by relating Turkey's security strategy to more general structural problems that feed instability and insurgency, like political marginalization and unsolved ethnic grievances. As the results show, Turkey's long-term stability in Iraq requires more than just border security and military cooperation; it also requires persistent political engagement and regional inclusion strategies.

In summary, this study demonstrates how Ankara's actions have changed regional security norms by offering a thorough, security-focused analysis of

Turkey's strategy in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. By combining state and sub-state processes, the study offers novel insights and emphasizes the delicate balance between regional cooperation, counterterrorism, and sovereignty. These results can guide future scholarly research and governmental decisions about regional security architectures and Turkey's place within them.

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نیگه‌رانییه ئەمینییه‌کانی تورکیا، کاریگه‌رییه ستراتیژییه‌کانی و وه‌لامه سیاسیه‌کانی له عێراق و
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پوخته:

ئهم تۆیژینه‌وه‌یه به‌ه‌واداچوون بۆ نیگه‌رانییه ئەمینییه‌کانی تورکیا و کاریگه‌رییه ستراتیژییه‌کان و وه‌لامانه‌وه‌ی سیاسه‌ته‌کانی به‌رامبه‌ر عێراق و هه‌ریمی کوردستان ده‌کات له ماوه‌ی ٢٠١٤-٢٠٢٤دا، له‌گه‌ڵ جه‌ختکردنه‌وه له‌سه‌ر ستراتیژییه‌کانی به‌ره‌نگاربوونه‌وه‌ی تیرۆر و کاریگه‌رییه‌کانی له‌سه‌ر ناوچه‌که. به‌پشتبەستن به‌ تیۆری نیوریالیستی، سه‌یری ئه‌وه ده‌کات که چۆن تورکیا بۆ پاراستنی ئاسایشی خۆی و چه‌سپاندنی با‌لاده‌ستی خۆی له‌ ناوچه‌که‌دا، هه‌ردوو ستراتیژی هێرشبه‌ری و به‌رگری به‌کاره‌یناوه. شیکارییه‌که جه‌خت له‌وه ده‌کاته‌وه که چۆن ستراتیژییه سه‌ربازییه‌کانی تورکیا و هه‌لو‌بستی دیپلۆماسی و به‌رژه‌وه‌ندییه ئابوورییه‌کانی تورکیا به‌ تێپه‌ربوونی کات گۆرانکارییان به‌سه‌ردا هاتووه، به‌تایبه‌تی سه‌باره‌ت به‌ حکومه‌تی هه‌ریمی کوردستان و رێککه‌وتنه ئەمینییه دووقۆلییه‌کان که بۆ پروبه‌ربووبوونه‌وه‌ی هه‌رمشه‌ی په‌که‌که به‌ستوویانه. ئه‌نجامه‌کان تیشک ده‌خه‌نه سه‌ر په‌یوه‌ندییه نوانسییه‌کانی نیوان ئیمتیازه ئەمینییه‌کانی تورکیا، ستراتیژی هاوسه‌نگی حکومه‌تی هه‌ریمی کوردستان و جیۆپۆله‌تیکی ناوچه‌یی گه‌ورمه‌تر. ئهم تۆیژینه‌وه‌یه زانیاری له‌سه‌ر ستراتیژییه ناوچه‌یه‌کانی تورکیا و کاریگه‌رییه‌کانیان له‌سه‌ر ئۆپه‌راسیۆنه‌کانی به‌ره‌نگاربوونه‌وه‌ی تیرۆر، سه‌روه‌ری و سه‌قامگیری له‌ سه‌رانسه‌ری رۆژه‌ه‌لاتی ناوه‌راستدا به‌رز ده‌کاته‌وه.

وشه‌ی سه‌رمه‌کیه‌کان:

تورکیا، ئاسایش، پارته‌ی کریکارانی کوردستان (په‌که‌که)، عێراق، و حکومه‌تی هه‌ریمی کوردستان.

المخاوف الأمنية لتركيا، والتداعيات الاستراتيجية، والاستجابات السياسية في العراق وإقليم كردستان (٢٠١٤-٢٠٢٤)

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ملخص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في المخاوف الأمنية لتركيا، وتداعياتها الاستراتيجية، واستجاباتها السياسية تجاه العراق وإقليم كردستان خلال الفترة ٢٠١٤-٢٠٢٤، مع التركيز على استراتيجياتها لمكافحة الإرهاب وتأثيرها على المنطقة. واستناداً إلى نظرية الواقعية الجديدة، تتناول الدراسة كيفية استخدام تركيا لاستراتيجيات هجومية ودفاعية لحماية أمنها وترسيخ هيمنتها في المنطقة. ويؤكد التحليل على كيفية تغير الاستراتيجيات العسكرية لتركيا، وموقفها الدبلوماسي، ومصالحها الاقتصادية بمرور الوقت، لا سيما فيما يتعلق بحكومة إقليم كردستان والاتفاقيات الأمنية الثنائية التي تقاطعت لمواجهة تهديد حزب العمال الكردستاني. وتسلط النتائج الضوء على العلاقة الدقيقة بين الضرورات الأمنية لتركيا، واستراتيجية حكومة إقليم كردستان المتوازنة، والوضع الجيوسياسي الإقليمي الأوسع. وتعزز هذه الدراسة المعرفة باستراتيجيات تركيا الإقليمية وتأثيرها على عمليات مكافحة الإرهاب، والسيادة، والاستقرار في جميع أنحاء الشرق الأوسط.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

تركيا، الأمن، حزب العمال الكردستاني ((PKK، العراق، وحكومة إقليم كردستان.