TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH THE IRAQI AND SYRIAN KURDS: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

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IŞIK UNIVERSITY

2018

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B.A., Department of International Relations, Işık University, 2012

Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of Master of Arts

in

International Relations

IŞIK UNIVERSITY

2018

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GRADUATE SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES

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APPROVAL DATE: 28.05.2018

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Abstract

This thesis examines the striking variance in Turkish foreign policy towards the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds between 2011 and 2017, during the Syrian civil war. It explains the difference in Turkish foreign policy by focusing on the impact of socially constructed identities on actor behavior with the guidance of Lene Hansen's discursive research model. This thesis argues that constructed identities, as the foundation and product of foreign policy, have a major role in shaping the difference in the incumbent Justice and Development Party's (AKP) foreign policy practices towards the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), as well as its armed wing People's Protection Units (YPG). Although both the KRG and the PYD/YPG are pro-Kurdish political formations, the AKP government pursued an alliance with the former from 2007 onwards, while it identified the latter as a national security threat. This thesis uses discourse analysis to inspect the tripartite relationship of these actors from the perspective of identity theory.

Key Words: Identity, Foreign Policy, Turkey, Middle East, Kurdistan Regional Government, Democratic Union Party

TÜRKİYE'NİN IRAK VE SURİYE KÜRTLERİ İLE İLİŞKİLERİ:
KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR YAKLAŞIM

Özet

Bu tez Suriye iç savaşı süresince, 2011 ve 2017 yılları arasında, Türk dış politikasında Irak ve Suriye Kürtlerine yönelik dikkat çekici farkı ele almaktadır. Tez, Türk dış politikasındaki bu farkı Lene Hansen'in söylemsel araştırma modeli rehberliğinde, sosyal olarak inşa edilen kimliklerin aktör davranışları üzerindeki etkisine odaklanarak açıklamaktadır. Tez, dış politikanın temeli ve sonucu olan, inşa edilmiş bu kimliklerin, iktidarda olan Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin (AKP) Irak Kürt Bölgesel Yönetimi (KRG) ve Demokratik Birlik Partisi'nin (PYD) yanı sıra, bu oluşumun askeri kanadı olan Halkın Savunma Birlikleri'ne (YPG) yönelik dış politika pratiklerini şekillendirmede büyük bir rolünün olduğunu tartışmaktadır. Hem KRG, hem de PYD/YPG'nin Kürt yanlısı siyasal oluşumlar olmasına rağmen AKP hükümeti, KRG ile 2007 yılından bu yana bir ittifak ilişkisi içerisindeyken, PYD/YPG'yi bir milli güvenlik tehdidi olarak tanımlamaktadır. Tez, bu aktörler arasındaki üçlü ilişkiyi söylem analizi kullanarak kimlik kuramı perspektifinden incelemektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kimlik, Dış Politika, Türkiye, Orta Doğu, Irak Kürt Bölgesel Yönetimi, Demokratik Birlik Partisi

Acknowledgements

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List of Abbreviations

AKP   : Justice and Development Party *(Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)*

CHP   : Republican People's Party *(Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)*

EU   : European Union

FSA   : Free Syrian Army *(al-Jaysh as-Sūrī al-Ḥurr)*

TBMM   : Grand National Assembly of Turkey *(Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi)*

ISIS   : Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham *(ed-Devlet'ül İslâmiyye fi'l Irak ve'ş Şam)*

KCK   : Kurdistan Communities Union *(Koma Civakên Kurdistan)*

KDP   : Kurdistan Democratic Party *(Partîya Demokrata Kurdistan a Irak)*

KNC   : Kurdish National Congress *(Encûmena Niştimanî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê)*

KRG   : Kurdistan Regional Government *(Hikûmetî Herêmî Kurdistanê)*

MHP   : Nationalist Action Party *(Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi)*

NATO   : North Atlantic Treaty Organization

PÇDK   : Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party *(Partî Çmereserî Dîmukratî Kurdistan)*

PJAK   : Kurdistan Free Life Party *(Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê)*

PKK   : Kurdistan Workers' Party *(Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê)*

PYD   : Democratic Union Party *(Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat)*

SKDP   : Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Democratic Party

SNC   : Syrian National Council

TAK   : Kurdistan Freedom Falcons *(Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan)*

YPG   : People's Protection Units *(Yekîneyên Parastina Gel)*

UN : United Nations

US : United States

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Research Design

1.1 Research Question and Theoretical Overview

The Middle East region has been the center of political attention for ages due to hosting great civilizations, its geographical location and natural resources. Lately, the region has been going through a chaotic period, which may even constitute the most complicated years of its history. Turkey is one of the key actors in the Middle East with an ever increasing frequency of interactions in the region. Like many other actors, Turkey's attention has recently focused on the states of Iraq and Syria due to the implications of the US (United States) War in Iraq from 2003 onwards, the civil war in Syria since 2011, and the ongoing armed struggles against ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham) in both countries. It has been argued by the Turkish officials that Turkey perceives many opportunities as well as security threats that stem from these two war-torn states.

One of the major concerns of the Turkish authorities is the Kurdish political movement in both Iraq and Syria. However, one can notice a striking variation regarding Turkey's policy towards the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds as Turkey has until very recently treated the KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government) as an important ally[1], while the PYD (Democratic Union Party) with its armed wing, YPG (People's Protection Units), in Syria is considered as a national security threat. The conventional wisdom is that Turkey perceives the possibility of

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[1] In June 2017, with Barzani's announcement of holding an independence referendum on September 25, the relationship between Turkey and the KRG has deteriorated, due to the AKP's severe opposition to this decision. However, these recent and changing dynamics are beyond the scope of this thesis.

an independent Kurdish state in the region as a security issue, but why does Turkish foreign policy towards the two groups with ethnically resonant identities vary this much? The purpose of this thesis is to uncover the impact of Turkey's constructed identities of the Self and the Others, the KRG and the PYD/YPG, over the variation of Turkey's foreign policy towards the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds.

Kurds are one of the biggest stateless nations in the world, as their population is estimated to be around 30 million only in the Middle East. And approximately half of them are residing in Turkey (Barkey, et al., 2015). The other half is spread among Iraq, Syria and Iran. As another prominent subject of debate, Turkey's domestic Kurdish issue has become an important minority struggle since the early 1980s; the start of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) attacks as a separatist terrorist organization which aims to gain independence for the Kurdish residents in the region. It is difficult to consider the Kurdish issue as merely an internal problem of Turkey, since it transcends the borders to neighboring regions in northern Iraq, Northeastern Syria and Iran. One of Ankara's biggest fears is the possibility of irredentist Kurdish movements in the region and the success story of the PYD/YPG's political gains to become a role model for the Kurdish citizens of its own, and to trigger a trans-border independence struggle. Just like the KRG, which emerged in the wake of the 2003 US War in Iraq, Syrian Kurds have seized the opportunity due to the civil war in the post-Arab Spring era to gain de facto autonomy and to expand their territory in the northern regions of Syria (called as *Rojava* in Kurdish, means "West" in English and refers to west of the Kurdistan region). The Turkish government is concerned with such an empowerment of the PYD/YPG, and wants to keep the Syrian Kurds on the Eastern flank of the Euphrates River. Therefore, the Turkish armed forces carried out a military operation called "Euphrates Shield" between August 2016 and March 2017 in order to push back ISIS down South and the Kurds to the East of the river (Bila, 2016).

The comparative cases of this research are the Turkish identity formation processes towards the Kurds in Iraq and Syria due to several reasons. First, the presence of Kurdish ethnic and political groups in these two states creates vulnerabilities for Turkey regarding the country's own Kurdish Issue. For example, it is argued that the KRG in northern Iraq managed to exploit this vulnerability in the past by using the PKK as leverage against Turkey's diplomatic initiatives in the international arena regarding the bilateral disputes like Kirkuk (Aras, 2011, p. 611). Therefore, the KRG has benefited from the PKK attacks in Turkey by forcing the Turkish government to include the KRG as part of the solution. Ankara

has realized that without the support of the KRG, Turkey would not be able to stop the PKK attacks. Additionally, pan-Kurdish and self-determination movements in Iraq and Syria cause anxiety on the Turkish side due to the existence of a troubled Kurdish minority within the latter's borders, and are prone to trigger a reaction against them (Gunter, 2013, p. 453). Second, since the start of the Arab Spring, one can thereby notice the escalation in the bilateral / multilateral interactions between the Turkish Government and the Kurds in Iraq and Syria. This situation provides ample opportunities and resources for researchers to examine and trace the connection between discursively constructed identities and foreign policy. The popularity of the region and the often-encountered political problems enable the creation of massive amounts of data, and also make the researchers' job easier to acquire raw data from the discourses that take place in given statements by the actors. Third, Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East has started to change since 2011, mostly due to the spillover of the unrest in a number of authoritarian states. Syria constitutes a focal point for Turkish foreign policy in order to extend its influence and possibly to divert the Syrian civil war according to the Turkish interests. This thesis examines an important variation in Turkish foreign policy, which emerged from 2011 onwards. Fourth, Kurdish population is present in Iran as well, but this research excludes Iran since the impact of the Arab Spring is minimal in this state, when compared with Syria and Iraq which brought these two countries near total breakdown. Arab Spring created vast opportunities for the Kurdish minorities in Iraq and Syria to expand their power, and increased the frequency of foreign policy interactions around the region. Also, the aforementioned developments fixed Turkey's attention on these two states. We do not encounter much interaction between Turkey and the Iranian Kurds, according to the number of the news pieces reflected on the media sources. Finally, studying these cases will not only provide us with a better understanding about Turkish foreign policy towards the Iraqi and the Syrian Kurds, but also will help us have a better idea about Turkish foreign policy towards other regional and international actors as well as about the relationship between identity and foreign policy in general.

The starting point of the theoretical basis of this research is the presence of a mutually constitutive, discursive relationship between identities and foreign policy. Lene Hansen points out the discursive construction of identities as both the foundation and product of foreign policy (Hansen, 2006, p. 20). Identities influence one's perception of the world, how they see others, interests and threats, as well as discourses and behavior. In return, one's own discourses, behavior and how others interpret them re-constructs its own identity

simultaneously. Similarly, Hopf (2002) emphasizes the mutually constitutive nature of identities and interests. Socially constructed identities in a political system create unique perceptional frameworks for its members which define their own interests, judgments and reactions against other social entities, and vice versa (Hopf, 2002, pp. 1-38). In other words, an identity determines the interests and actions of its members and how they perceive the others. In return, actions and interests of the Self define its identity.

Leaders and state officials' discourses about certain societal entities play an essential role in identity construction of the Self and Other, policies, interests, threats, and security problems. The construction of the Self requires a social comparison of the subject with a rival, distant, and sometimes radical Other. The Self and Other are thus simultaneously constructed via processes of linking and differentiation. The process of linking refers to loading the identity of the Self with certain aspects that defines how one sees its own self. These aspects of the Self's identity are often positively linked with one another. The process of differentiation refers to attributing the identity of the Other with often negatively loaded aspects which are opposite to the Self. Through the processes of differentiation and linking, it is possible to analyze the relative ability of a discourse to present a construction of an identity (Hansen, 2006, pp. 17-26).

Just like interests and threats, materiality is not independent from identity related perceptive frameworks; hence it is always discursively constructed. The goal of the identity theory is to study how the facts are formed and how they influence the foreign policy debates. Also, how facts are coupled with representations of identity and particular policies (Hansen, 2006, pp. 22, 28). Foreign policy discourse can be conceptualized as a model of creating a link between identity and policy by demonstrating how a particular foreign policy is possible based on a particular representation of identity. A link justifies the policy from the perspective of a certain identity, and consolidates the identity by re-constructing itself. If there is an imbalance in this link, there will be an attempt to make an adjustment to recreate stability through modification of identity or proposed policy (Hansen, 2006, p. 26). If such an attempt would not take place, it could jeopardize the credibility of the actor, thereby could result in an electoral defeat and its marginalization from the international arena. Hence, from an inductive point of view, an actor's need for maintaining stability in the discursive link between identity and policy indicates that identities have an essential role in explaining actor behavior in international relations.

Identity based approaches place discourses at the core of their research. The identification of identity construction (linking and differentiation) processes, the presence of discursive links between identity and foreign policy requires a careful analysis of political discourses. Since discourses are foundations and products of the dominant identities, the method of discourse analysis is considered as one of the major ways of identifying the identities in play and it is used in the thesis to see how Turkey's constructed identities of the self and others make a particular Turkish foreign policy towards the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds possible. The AKP (Justice and Development Party) officials construct and use the identities to describe Turkey, and to justify its foreign policy practices in order to secure the electorate and international support.

In addition, this research offers striking connection in the AKP discourse and foreign policy. The Iraqi Kurds are identified as friends; whereas the Syrian Kurds are presented as a serious security threat. In line with this assumption, while the AKP and the KRG have been developing in a multi-layered partnership since 2007, the AKP strongly opposes the PYD/YPG's territorial and political gains in Syria and does not hesitate to intervene with the Turkish military when necessary. This results from the AKP's perceived identities of the two Kurdish actors. This thesis aims to designate the identities in operation through discourse analysis, and to compare the identified identities with implemented foreign policy of Turkey. Consequently, this thesis demonstrates the role of the identities in explaining actors' behavior in the international arena. In the following chapters, readers could find a detailed analysis of the Turkish foreign policy discourse about the KRG and the PYD as well as its armed wing YPG in order to reveal how the AKP has marginalized the PYD/YPG while the KRG is considered as an ally.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Identity and Foreign Policy

Studies about the impact of identity on foreign policy have gained significance after the increasing popularity of the constructivist approach from the 1990s onwards, especially following the famous contributions made by Alexander Wendt. In *"Anarchy is What States Make of It"* (1992), Wendt proposes that states' perceived identities towards each other shape

their relations and the nature of the anarchical international system. In this sense, international interactions guided by actors' identities, determine the positivity or negativity of the relations which respectively construct a cooperative or an egoistic international structure. Wendt (1999) and other constructivists (Onuf 1989; Lapid and Kratochwil 1996) challenge the dominance of neorealist and neoliberal theories in world politics.

Instead, constructivists emphasize the importance of norms and identities that govern the perception and behavior of the actors. In "*The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory*" (1998), Ted Hopf argues that actors develop their relations with, and understandings of, others through accumulation of norms and practices. Thus, systemic structures are meaningless without intersubjective set of norms and practices. Anarchy, the main structural component of the mainstream theories also becomes meaningless. This argument refers to the essential difference between the mainstream theories and norm – identity based approaches. In "*The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory*" (1998), Jeffrey Checkel claims that norms are collective understandings which determine the behavior of the actors by constituting their identities and interests. Checkel also emphasizes the mutual construction of agents and structures, as states define their identity and interests as a result of their structural interactions with other actors.

Following these valuable contributions, one could ask about the functions of identities, and why actors need them to define themselves and the others. In "*Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security*" (1996), Katzenstein et al. connect the concept of identity directly with foreign policy by defining it as a functioning link between environmental structures and interests. Besides, the authors add that the concept of identity originally used in the field of social psychology, where it refers to the image of selfhood, and is formed through interactions with important others. Hence, the concept of identity makes references to mutually constructed and evolving images of the self and other. Additionally, getting to the bottom of the identity debate about why people need or use identities to define themselves and others requires multi-disciplinary knowledge of sociology, psychology and political science. Human beings tend to subconsciously attribute etiquettes of certain meanings on everything they encounter, including objects and animals, in order to minimize the everyday calculations our minds make. In "*Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999"* (2002), Ted Hopf states that the major reason for the universal presence and operation of identities is the cognitive human desire for order,

predictability and certainty. Therefore, identities categorize people according to their common features, making the other's actions more understandable and predictable. In his analysis of the Russian society of 1955 and 1999, Hopf emphasizes the formation of identity through domestic dynamics operating within social – cognitive structures. Hence, as part of the domestic society, political elites also perceive the world in accordance with the national identity.

Defining the functions of identities leaves us with another essential question. How does a state define itself vis-à-vis others? In other words, how do state actors construct their identities? In "*Collective Identity Formation and the International State*" (1994), Alexander Wendt clarifies the process of identity construction. Wendt puts forward two different types of identities of states: corporate and social identities. First, corporate identity is defined as an inherent, cognitive tool which constitutes actor individuality. Thus, the corporate identity of the state creates four basic interests: physical security, predictability in relationships with the world, recognition as an actor by the others and economic development. Wendt also adds that corporate identity reflects the domestic properties of the actor, and exists prior to interaction with other actors. Second, social identities define the self in relation to the other. These types of identities are a collection of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of the others. In contrast to the singular quality of corporate identity, actors usually have multiple social identities depending on various aspects of the social structure. Wendt de-emphasizes corporate identity since it stems from domestic properties, and argues that social identities have the capacity to determine an actor's relative position in a system by attaining it a social role. In this respect, social identities generate self-interests or collective interests depending on the identification of the self and other. Thus, the other could be perceived in a scale which starts from an anathema to the self, and ends at the extension of the self. Accordingly, depending on the degree of marginalization of each other, actors could perceive the international structure as an egoistic self-help system, reflecting the neorealist approach, or as a cooperative system that enables collective action, consistent with the perspective of the neoliberal theory.

A number of scholars have so far investigated world politics in order to reveal identities' influence over state behavior. For example, D'Anieri (2002) analyzes Russia's efforts to protect its great power status. Lantis (2002) studies Germany's concerns about converting its identity into a normal power, while Banchoff (1999) inspects German identity

within Europe, and answers why predictions of structural theories have failed about Germany in the post-Cold war years. Also, Risse et al. (1999) compare differences in French, British and German national identities, and their policies toward the European monetary union. Ripley (2002) studies China's efforts to overcome its global identity, and Pavri (2002) focuses on India's concerns that its great power self-identity has never been acknowledged by others (Kaarbo, 2003, p. 159).

One of the most cited works about the impact of identity on world politics is *"Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity"* by David Campbell (1992), which connects the dots between identity and foreign policy. In this book, Campbell explains the simultaneous mutual construction of identity and foreign policy as a result of the discursive differentiation of the Self and the Other. Also, the term of foreign policy is based on the differentiation process of identities within internal and external dimensions. Such a differentiation, argues Campbell, stems from presenting the Self as a perfectly normal, civilized society in order to establish societal unity, while others are usually marginalized through negative references. The author often makes references to Thomas Hobbes' famous book "Leviathan" to stress the strict separation of the exterior and interior realms, and presence of differentiated identities such as rational, civilized man versus drunks or savages. The exterior is always associated with the references of danger and savagery, while the interior is represented with rationality and civilization. Hence, foreign policy is usually shaped to deal with the external threats generated by marginalized outsiders. Campbell argues that locating most of the threats in the external realm has to be understood as serving a certain interpretative and political function. Additionally, as an outcome of exclusionary practices, resistant elements in the interior realm are usually linked through a discourse of danger with the threats identified on the outside. Such an argument provides an explanatory basis for the construction of domestic threats and security issues.

However, the other is not necessarily attributed with negative references. In "*Identity and International Relations*" (2008), Lebow contends that differences between the Self and Other could be overthrown by assimilation or dedication to common values. Hence, a similar argument is also made by Hansen (2006: 35) who discusses that the Other could be differentiated as the superior. For instance, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, newly emerged Central European countries were trying to prove their Europeanness by constructing the identity of the Western countries as their superior.

The issue of national identity formation is another important subject in the field. Wendt elaborates on the formation of national identity and interests in "*Social Theory of International Politics*" (1999). According to Wendt, identity formation process of a state is affected by the international structure as a result of social interactions. Subsequently, identity determines national interests in accordance with the perception of other states. On the other hand, scholars such as Prizel and Bloom disagree with Wendt's anthropomorphic state concept by arguing that the aspects of a national identity are rooted in domestic political competition. In *"National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine"*, Ilya Prizel (1998) argues that the sub-state level competition of identities results in a domination of a certain societal identity which, consequently, is entitled to govern and articulate their unique foreign policies. For instance, Prizel provides the examples of Russia's inconsistent foreign policy with three different governing bodies in the post-Russian Empire era in order to emphasize the dialectical relationship between the definition of national identity and formulation of foreign policy. William Bloom in "*Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations"* (1993) describes foreign policy as a tool for nation building that can create a situation in which the society can perceive a threat to their identity and get mobilized accordingly, or a chance to protect and enhance it. Bloom also stresses that the aforementioned situation makes the public quite vulnerable to manipulations, as a political strategy, which is followed to obtain mass electorate support.

The concept of security is naturally at the core of international relations theories since it is directly related to the survival of the state. It is, therefore, also important for the connection between identity and foreign policy. In "*Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma*" (2006), Jennifer Mitzen analyzes the use of others in the framework of ontological security. Mitzen emphasizes the states' need for security dilemmas in order to consolidate their identities in relation to others. Also, in "*Security: A New Framework for Analysis"* (1998), Buzan et al. explain the act of securitization as a discursive tool of political competition. Securitization refers to presenting an issue as an existential threat and asking for public support to take extraordinary measures in order to maintain the survivability of the societal entity (Buzan, et al., 1998, pp. 23-24). Securitization theory is highly connected with the debate about identity and foreign policy. For, security is a subjective practice as an outcome of a certain identity. An issue is not required to be an objective existential threat in order for securitization to take place. Instead, it could be

presented or perceived as one (Buzan, et al., 1998, p. 24). Securitization is intersubjective and socially constructed, thereby it may seem paranoid or illusive to outsiders who do not share a common background. Thus, certain societal groups engage in self-reinforcing rivalries with other groups by using the act of securitization as a tool of justifying themselves, to gain public support for their possible extraordinary behavior (Buzan, et al., 1998, pp. 30-31, 36-37).

An alternative approach to identity based actor behavior is the role theory conception, originally introduced by Kalevi J. Holsti in "*National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy*" (1970). Holsti describes the roles as appropriate orientations and behaviour of a state in the international environment. Thus, the definition of roles is quite similar to identities in terms of functionality but roles are more like behavioral guidelines for states in order to follow a certain foreign policy strategy. In addition, Wish (1980) and Walker (1987) catalogued different roles adopted by states and their impacts on foreign policy, and also, investigated origins of national role conceptions. In Turkey, role theory is also applied in order to further understand foreign policy dynamics. *"From Good Neighbor to Model: Turkey's Changing Roles in the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring"* by Özdamar et al. (2014) applies Holsti's role theory to the case of Turkey. Role theory implies that actors' foreign policies are formulated in accordance with their perceived role within the international structure. In line with this theoretical framework, Özdamar et al. have identified some key roles followed by the AKP government, such as; pivotal country, role model, mediator, defender of regional peace, regional subsystem collaborator and good neighbor. Due to several international developments following the Arab Spring, the authors realized that some of the roles have been transformed or replaced accordingly.

1.2.2 Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy towards the Kurds in Iraq and Syria

Despite the restricted number and variety of studies on identity and foreign policy in Turkey, it is fair to argue that studies in this direction gained popularity particularly from the 1990s onwards. Scholars including Bozdağlıoğlu (2003; 2008), Coşkun (2012), Somer (2002; 2005), Yeşiltaş (2013), Aslan (2013), Balcı and Miş (2008), Duran (2013), Warning and Kardaş (2011), Ardıç (2014) and Arkan and Kınacıoğlu (2016) investigated the correlation between identity and Turkish foreign policy. For instance, *"Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish Identity: A Constructivist Approach"* by Yücel Bozdağlıoğlu (2003) provides a broad

analysis of contemporary Turkish history and identity, and underlines the heavy influence of identities over foreign policy. The author finds Wendt's approach too narrow since it only focuses on state level identity creation. Also, Bozdağlıoğlu opposes Wendt's argument regarding the neutral stance of states in the pre-interaction phase, and asserts that every state is already loaded with their dominant/national identity properties. Hence, the nature of the interaction depends on the familiarity of the actors' identities. If the familiarity is less, actors' experiences about each other are likely to be loaded with negative aspects or vice versa. In the case of Turkey, Bozdağlıoğlu argues that Turkey went through an identity crisis after its marginalization by the European states since the 1950s, which de-legitimized national westernization policies to a great extent and led to the rise of the Islamist movement. Consequently, the Islamist right wing parties started to gain popularity from the 1960s onwards, and Turkish foreign policy became more aware of its neo-Ottoman roots. Although the book provides a precise analysis about Turkey's identity and foreign policy, it covers the period until the 1990s. Additionally, Bozdağlıoğlu discusses the AKP era in one of his articles; *"Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy"* (2008). In this article, the author uses the constructivist approach to explain Turkish foreign policy in general as a reflection of the recently constructed Islamic national identity. Bozdağlıoğlu addresses the AKP as an Islamist party, which formulates Turkish foreign policy in accordance with a neo-Ottoman, pro-Muslim approach. Hence, he argues that the Strategic Depth doctrine of Ahmet Davutoğlu, former Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, suggests that Turkey sits in the middle of various geocultural basins, and should use its cultural and historical ties, which were inherited from the Ottoman era, in order to gain influence in the region. Consequently, Bozdağlıoğlu argues that the aforementioned pro-Muslim foreign policy discourse has gradually evolved into an anti-West and anti-Semitic atmosphere. Lastly, the article is concluded with an argument that the newly created Islamic nationalist identity has been a major cause behind the hatred toward religious and ethnic minorities in the domestic sphere, and the alienation from the West at the international level.

Another resourceful example on identity and Turkish foreign policy is *"Uluslararası İlişkilerde Kimlik ve Türk Dış Politikası" (Identity and Turkish Foreign Policy in International Relations)* by Coşkun (2012). The author briefly analyzes contemporary Turkish foreign policy from the perspective of identity, and argues that the current national identity reflects the properties of the dominant political elite rather than a common national identity. Therefore, like many other nation states, Turkey has tried to unify the masses under a certain

identity, which proved to be unsatisfying according to the author and caused conflicts based on ethnicity. From the perspective of European states, having defeated their long-time rival, the Ottoman Empire, and being perceived as a role model by its successor, they have boosted their confidence and justified the marginalization of Turkey from Europe as the Other. Such an interaction could be one of the main reasons why Turkey's candidacy for joining the EU has been frozen, and why Turkey started to de-legitimize its westernization policies in recent years. Hence, the AKP government has built closer diplomatic relations with the Middle Eastern states, which increased Turkey's trade volume and political influence in the region. The author concludes that every group in the society has different perceptions of national interest and threat, and these groups possess varying capacities to influence the foreign policy decision making process.

Moreover, in "*Failures of the Discourse of Ethnicity: Turkey, Kurds, and the Emerging Iraq*" (2005), Murat Somer makes an argument similar to Wendt (1992) in the sense that the degree of differentiation between the self and others determines the nature of the interstate relations. Somer argues that Turkey opposes the KRG's demands of independence not only due to its domestic Kurdish question, but also because of the increased risk of armed struggle in ethnically separated regions. Hence, a Kurdish controlled state in a federal Iraq would be prone to identity based conflicts between Arabs, Turkmen and Kurds which could worsen Turkey's relations with the KRG, and cause discontent among domestic Kurdish citizens. Moreover, Somer predicts that the KRG's full independence is not likely due to its economic interdependence to regional powers like Turkey and Iran, which oppose a Kurdish state because of their own vulnerabilities about their domestic Kurdish populations. Alternatively, in "*The Transformation of the Geopolitical Vision in Turkish Foreign Policy*" (2013), Murat Yeşiltaş analyzes the new geopolitical discourse and the changing geopolitical identity of the AKP period. The author argues that former Turkish governments were following defensive geopolitics in which the nation state was the most important reference point. However, the AKP has followed a wider discourse which focused on cultural regions such as the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Balkans and North Africa.

Relations between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds has been a popular subject among the scholars due to the PKK presence in northern Iraq and Turkey's domestic Kurdish issue. Turkey's support for the Iraqi Kurds after the First (1991) Gulf War has triggered a rapprochement process between the two parties. Academic studies about the improving

relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds could be categorized under two main headlines. The first group of scholars including Mango (1992), Aykan (1996; 1998) and Criss (1997) argue that Turkish government has continued to follow its traditional pro status-quo foreign policy strategy. Thus, the improving relations between Turkey and the KRG were inferred as a typical balancing strategy of the Turkish foreign policy which aims to maintain positive relations with the neighbors while the state is committed to its responsibilities of the long standing Western alliance. The second group of academics including Sayarı (1992; 1997), Robins (1991; 2003a; 2003b) and Hale (1992) claim that Turkey has diverted from its traditional foreign policy trajectory and began to follow a more active policy in the region.

The relationship between Turkey and the KRG has entered a new phase with the United States (US) invasion of Iraq in 2003. There are several works conducted to analyze the bilateral interactions between these actors. Some of these works, for example, discuss the causes of improving Turkey-KRG relations from 2007 onwards. *"Turkey and Iraq: The Making of a Partnership"* by Henri Barkey (2011) underlines that there have been many opportunities for Turkey to extend its influence in Iraq, after the withdrawal of the US troops. Barkey argues that Turkey realized the economic importance of Iraq, KRG in particular, with its demanding market for Turkish companies and rich oil resources. From the KRG's perspective, Turkey offers a powerful economy for oil purchases and future investments in northern Iraq. Turkey also is a neighbor which is negotiating to join the EU and which can provide a direct link between the KRG and the European markets. Barkey states that a partnership is highly beneficial for both parties, as the AKP government asked the KRG to convince the PKK to drop the armed struggle, and the KRG played an important role in starting the peace negotiations in 2009. Moreover, *"Turkey's Changing Relations with Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government"* by Özlem Kayhan Pusane (2016) studies Turkey – KRG relations from the perspective of economic and strategic partnership. Kayhan Pusane emphasizes the multi-layered mutual interdependence between the two parties due to Turkey's need to diversify its energy suppliers, a great market demand for Turkish goods in northern Iraq, the KRG's need for support from a regional power in the way of full independence, and the need to contain the recent empowerment of the Syrian Kurds. The author focuses on the involvement of Barzani in Turkey's domestic Kurdish issue as well, and PKK/PYD/YPG's dissatisfaction since it was considered as an act to undermine Öcalan's identity as the key leader of the Kurds. With the civil war in Syria, the PYD/YPG has gained considerable political power and territory in the region. According to Kayhan Pusane, this

development caused a reaction from both the KRG and Turkey, and forced them to partner up to contain the PYD/YPG. Such a reaction revealed the power struggle among the Kurdish factions since it caused serious tension between the KRG and the PYD/YPG.

Furthermore, scholars including Barkey (2010; 2011; 2015), Özcan (2010; 2011), Sarı Ertem (2011), Charountaki (2012), Cornell (2012), Park (2012; 2014), Bryza (2012), Tocci (2013), Mills (2013), Balcı (2014), Çağaptay (2014), Tol (2014), Gunter (2011; 2013), Paasche and Mansurbeg (2014), Morelli and Pischedda (2014), Bengio (2014), Jozel (2014), Romano (2015), Gunter (2013; 2015) and Yılmaz (2017) identified the rapprochement between Turkey and the KRG with emphasis on various factors such as Turkey's economic and energy needs, changing approach toward the Kurdish question in Turkey, and the civil war in Syria.

Due to the absence of formal relations between Turkey and the Syrian Kurds before the civil war in 2011, the subject was neglected by the academic circles. Therefore, the number of works which analyze the relations between Turkey and the Syrian Kurds is relatively lower in comparison to the studies that evaluate Turkey's relations with the Iraqi Kurds. Scholars including Ayhan (2009), Barkey (2014), Gunter (2013; 2014; 2015), Jongerden and Şimşek (2015) descriptively analyze the relations between Turkey and the Syrian Kurds. In addition to these, *"Turkish-Syrian Relations Go Downhill"* by Damla Aras (2012) discusses why Turkey and Syria's relations have deteriorated in recent years, although the two were allies before the uprising. Aras claims that Ankara supported the Sunni opposition forces, particularly those associated with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, since they share a common religious identity, unlike the Alawite al-Assad regime. If such a transformation of power could have happened, argues Aras, Turkey would reinforce its influence in the Middle East and North Africa regions and gain advantage against its regional rival Iran in the near future, yet the possibility of overthrowing al-Assad government has decreased slightly due to current circumstances. Besides, the civil war in Syria could revive the PKK threat in Turkey because the PYD/YPG's success in Syria could constitute a role model for the Kurds in Turkey. Aras concludes that, Assad has played the PKK card as retaliation to Turkey's support for the opposition forces in the civil war. Serhat Erkmen, on the other hand, provides a detailed descriptive report of Syrian Kurds' relationship with Turkey and other actors in the region, in *"Türkiye ve Suriyeli Kürtler: Güven Bunalımı, Tıkanmışlık ve Bir Arada Yaşama"* (Turkey and Syrian Kurds: Confidence Crisis, Deadlock

and Coexistence) (2012). Erkmen criticizes Turkey for not knowing Syrian Kurds close enough, and states that Syrian Kurds have been perceived as either the PYD/YPG or the PKK sympathizers. Of course, this is due to the PYD/YPG's strong position among the Syrian Kurds, and their wide influence throughout the Kurdish-controlled territories in Syria. Erkmen, however, asserts that there are four different elements in the Syrian Kurdish political environment, which are first, the PYD/YPG and the PYD/YPG-linked organizations; second, Syrian Kurdish Democracy Party (similar to Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party in northern Iraq); third, youth movements; and finally the neutral masses. The author argues that these Syrian Kurdish factions should be studied in detail by the Turkish authorities in order to build up a solid foreign policy. Erkmen as well believes, as other scholars do, that the empowerment of the Syrian Kurds is perceived as an irredentist threat by the Turkish government regarding the Kurdish population in Turkey. This is due to the ongoing debate about the PYD/YPG's alleged close connection with the PKK, the increase in numbers of captured Syrian fighters affiliated with the PKK, and the increased use of the Rojava region as a base for the PKK attacks in Turkey. For example, former Prime Minister Davutoğlu declared the PYD/YPG as responsible for the two bomb attacks in Turkey, in 2016; however, the PYD/YPG has denied both accusations (Davutoğlu, 2016b).

Kurdish population constitutes the biggest stateless nation in the World and it is present in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran in the Middle East. In "*Kurdish Identities and Political Struggle in the Middle East*" (2013), Barzoo Eliassi contends that the Kurds have been ethnically suppressed in all these four states and suffered a great deal to extend their collective rights. The Kurds experienced varying political and military conflicts for recognition in different countries. For example, Eliassi points out the Turkish government's long lasting denial of the Kurdish presence in its borders. For many years, Turkish leaders and the media tended to define the Kurdish groups as a threat to Turkey's territorial integrity and to marginalize them as tribes, bandits and sheiks. The author states that before it was cancelled, the settlement process between Turkey and the PKK did very little for improving the Kurds' recognition. In Iraq, the Kurds have managed to get officially recognized as a semi-autonomous actor after Saddam Hussein's reign in 2005. In the Syrian civil war, with the exceptional gains in territory and the political arena, the Kurds unilaterally declared autonomy in 2013, but it is not yet officially recognized by the Syrian government.

One who studies the Kurds in the Middle East cannot overlook the writings of Michael Gunter since he wrote many books and articles on this subject. In a recent, descriptive and summarizing study titled *"The Kurdish Spring"* (2013), Gunter describes the situation of the Kurds in Turkey, Iraq and Syria in detail. In Turkey, Gunter discusses the failure of the Democratic Opening initiative due to oppressive measures taken by the AKP government such as arrests of the academics, Kurdish politicians, journalists, and Erdoğan's denial of the Kurdish issue itself after the initiative has ended. In Iraq, the KRG's disputes with the Baghdad government over the state of Kirkuk and sharing of oil revenues are mentioned in detail. Hence, the KRG's intensive partnership with Turkey forces the AKP government to take side along with the KRG in the bilateral dispute, which angers Baghdad due to Turkey's involvement in Iraq's internal affairs. The situation of the Kurds in Syria is much more complicated due to the power struggle among the Kurds, the ongoing civil war in the country, and the unclear numbers of participants in the conflict. Gunter claims that after Turkey's intense support for the anti-Assad opposition, Damascus violated the Adana Agreement (1998), which banned the PKK forces from the Syrian territory, and invited the exiled PYD/YPG leader Salih Muslim into the country. Gunter argues that there is an implicit alliance between the PYD/YPG and the Syrian government, which allows the PYD/YPG to act independently from other Kurdish actors and to delay the unification of the opposition forces against the government. Also, Gunter points out to the hostile relations between the Syrian Kurds and the Arabs, since the Kurds claim that Arabs do not respect and recognize them as an ethnic group.

Lastly, in "Sowing Divisions: Kurds in the Syrian War" (2017), Kaya and Whiting discuss the circumstances which the Kurds had to deal with during the civil war and their relations with the governments of Syria, Iraq and Turkey. Due to the rivalries among them, the Kurdish factions of the Middle East have failed to act in unity in the absence of a common enemy such as ISIS. Also, the authors argue that the Kurds in all these three countries have been following certain kinds of strategies to gain the right of self-determination in gradual steps. Hence, the host states' capacities to resist the Kurdish claims are the deciding factors at this point. While the KRG intends to gain full independence in Iraq, their counterparts in Syria and Turkey, the PYD/YPG and PKK, aim to gain confederative autonomy. However, contrary to the developments in Iraq and Syria, the Kurds in Turkey failed to achieve any kind of autonomy so far due to Turkey's still strong military and bureaucracy. As Kaya and Whiting discuss, Turkey's campaign to resist Kurdish transnational aspirations extended the

Turkish struggle beyond its borders. Turkey severely opposed formation of a continuous Kurdish belt along its southern border by trying to restrict the construction process of an autonomous area in Rojava, in addition to the already existing one in northern Iraq.

In sum, there are several studies about Turkish foreign policy towards the Kurds in Iraq and Syria, which explain these policies within different frameworks. Where the mainstream approaches fall short, the identity theory that feeds from the discursive methodology has a chance to explain the events more thoroughly by underlining actor specific perceptions, interests and threats. Also, if Hansen's model proves to be adequate for this research, it could be useful in analyzing Turkey's relations with the rest of the world as well. There is an important gap in the academic scholarship regarding evaluations of Turkish foreign policy from the scope of identity. Since the Middle Eastern region is fertile to new developments every day, it deserves much more scholarly attention in order to have a better understanding of the actors' behaviors more precisely. Thus, the findings of this research are projected to answer the following questions, which have not been so far answered by the existing studies: how does the AKP define Turkey's identity and how does it justify its policies toward the Kurds in Iraq and Syria? How does the AKP perceive the Others, in our case, the KRG and the PYD/YPG, and finally to what extent does the constructed image of these Others impact the relationship between Turkey and the Kurds in Iraq and Syria?

1.3 Methodology

This research focuses on identities with the assumption about their capacity to shape actor-specific behavior. Identities could be determined efficiently through discourse analysis since discourses are considered as a product of identity; one could trace the ideological source of a certain speech by analyzing how the pronouns and metaphors are used in it. In other words, language is a system of signs that generate meaning as a reflection of the actors' identity; yet, it also produces the identity simultaneously (Hansen, 2006, p. 15). In this mutually constitutive environment, discourse analysis is the methodological tool of this research because a discourse maintains a pattern which produces preconditions for action, and has the capacity of providing possible outcomes (Neumann, 2008, p. 62). Hence, the researcher could construct a causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The goal of foreign policy discourse is to create a stable link between the

representation of identity and proposed policies (Hansen, 2006, p. 16). The method of discourse analysis allows us to identify the identities hidden in behind the speeches of a leader from a certain societal group. An interpretive thick description demands from the analyst to carry out detailed research in order to gather massive amounts of empirical data. Reconstructing the operation of identity politics, even for a short period, requires thousands of pages of reading, archival research and public observations (Hopf, 1998, p. 198).

Discourse analysis is used in a wide range of disciplines such as linguistics, education, sociology, anthropology, international relations, social psychology, cultural studies and more. Therefore, there are different paradigms and methodologies under this school of research. These vary in several important ways: in their focus, in what sorts of knowledge claim they aim to make, and in variations of methods they use (Hammersley, 2001). One of the most influential paradigms, 'critical discourse analysis' focuses on the social and political issues which incorporates the field of international relations as well. According to critical discourse analysis, language does not ordinarily reflect the external reality; instead it is constitutive of that reality and our knowledge about it (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 2004, p. 10). International relations is a vast area of inquiry that focuses on various issues both domestic and internationally. To begin with, scholars including Laclau and Mouffe (1987), Gibbons (1987), Shapiro (1988), Butler (1990), Purvis and Hunt (1993), Walker (1993), Harré and Gillett (1994), Doty (1997), Laffey and Weldes (1997), Weldes (1999), Hopf (2002) used discourse analysis to focus on comparing it with other approaches in the field, the discursive treatment of language, causality and agency issues (Milliken, 1999, p. 249). In addition, academics who study political debates and argument strategies are, for example: Maas (1984), Strauber (1986), Condit (1987), Agar (1987), Billig (1988; 1991), Smit (1989), Kaid et al. (1990), Dryzek (1990), Fischer and Forester (1993) and Windisch (1995). Furthermore, scholars who analyzed political polarization that focuses on syntaxes and semantics include Maitland and Wilson (1987), Wilson (1990) and Zupnik (1994). Moreover, the use of metonymies and metaphors are often encountered in political discourse. Scholars who got involved with this subject are: Mumby and Spitzack (1983), Chilton (1985; 1987; 1995), Howe (1988), Read et al. (1990), Chilton and Ilyin (1993), Akioye (1994), Blommaert (1994), and Zashin and Chapman (1974) (Van Dijk, 1997).

The method of discourse analysis is one of the major ways in identifying the identities in a political environment. In "*Identity, Communities and Foreign Policy: Discourse Analysis as Foreign Policy Theory*" (2002), Ole Wæver emphasizes the role of discourses in analyzing

the dichotomy of the self and other. Accordingly, the collective self signifies itself with essential ideas such as what constitutes a nation, and uses these ideas to create political mobilization which produces discursive conflicts with the other. Wæver argues that these discursive clashes could be studied as the core of world politics and foreign policy analysis. As a promising discipline of inquiry, discourse analysis is not limited with a single method; there are several scholars advocating different ways of its application. In *"The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods"* (1999), Jennifer Milliken explains various methods of discourse analysis. It is presupposed that discourses are structures of signification which construct social realities, but not exclusively linguistic; thereby materiality is meaningless from this perspective. Therefore, discourses are capable of producing subjects authorized to speak, audiences for authorized actors, common sense, and of organizing and controlling public spaces. To begin with, predicate analysis is used for the study of language practices in texts which include diplomatic documents, theory articles, official statements and transcripts of interviews. Predicate analysis focuses on verbs, adverbs and adjectives attached to nouns in order to understand how the nouns are described by the actor. Scholars such as Lecomte (1986), Lecomte and Marandin (1986), Alker and Sylvan (1994), Doty (1993; 1996), Milliken and Sylvan (1996) and Milliken (1999) benefited from the method of predicate analysis in their studies. Milliken adds that a single sample of text cannot be accounted for empirical reliability; thus, the analysis should be based on a set of texts preferably articulated by different persons of authority. Additionally, argues Milliken, an analysis can be considered reliable when new texts match consistently with the theoretical categories created by the researcher (Milliken, 1999, pp. 229-234). Predicate analysis is quite similar with the method of our selection for this research, described above by Hansen due to two reasons. This method promises to explain how discourses overlap and the structures of meaning they share through a comparison of the object definitions and distinctions used systematically by different preachers. Such an analysis provides us with an understanding of how policies are linked with identities, and how the Others are differentiated. Also, through predicate analysis' control over interpretive procedures, one can construe how a discourse is ordered, and how discourses vary in their construction of social reality (Milliken, 1999, pp. 234-236). Moreover, other methods of discourse analysis explained by the writer are as follows: first, deconstructive method refers to examining a discourse to see which side of opposition it privileges, and which reality have been chosen from a number of options. In other words, this method's goal is to show that the reality could have been interpreted differently. Second, juxtapositional method is similar with deconstruction, only it offers to

explain that in some instances reality has been implemented differently. Third, the method called subjugated knowledge offers an examination of the dominating discourse, how the dominating discourses silence their alternatives. Finally, genealogical method is a long term historical analysis that is planned to demonstrate ruptures and discontinuities in dominated discourses in order to lead readers to become aware of the orientations and actions that they often take for granted (Milliken, 1999, pp. 242-243). Although Milliken puts a great effort in describing different methods of discourse analysis, she does not provide a guideline on how to apply them as Hansen does.

Additional scholars juxtapose the uses of discourse analysis as well. In *"Methodological Reflections on Discourse Analysis"* (2004) by Laffey and Weldes, discourses are emphasized as not only a linguistic practice, but they also involve non-linguistic, behavioral practices. Laffey and Weldes explain two important practices of discourses: First, discourses can perform articulation, which refers to socially constructed, historically contingent bonds that are formed to bind different terms, symbols and meanings together. Second, interpellation is an act that hails the audience in order to get them identified with subject-positions, which causes the audience to make sense of the representations of a discourse. For example, before the Cuban crisis Bush interpellated the U.S. public as a free people who defend a free way of life, who wish to preserve freedom and the independence of other nations in order to make sense of the U.S. policy. In addition, Ted Hopf in *"Discourse and Content Analysis: Some Fundamental Incompatibilities"* (2004), notes that discourse analysis is about power politics since discourses reproduce predominant configurations of power. The meaning of any discourse is not fixed; they depend on the contexts in which a particular text is articulated. Thereby, discourse analysis is based on the condition of intertextuality. Also, the scope of discourse analysis in more than just words and written texts, it is also about daily practices which constructs our social world as well.

Since securitization is a subjective practice and highly related with constructed identities as proposed by Buzan et al. (1998), securitization theory is also very useful for conducting discourse analysis to understand the main framework of the content. As an example, the AKP presents the territorial gains of the PYD/YPG as an existential security issue for Turkey's territorial integrity due to its ongoing domestic Kurdish question, and justifies its aggressive behavior towards the PYD/YPG. Also, from another perspective, Turkey justifies its involvement in the Syrian civil war by arguing that Turkish kin, the Turkmen population is under severe threat and in need of protection due to violence

conducted by the Syrian government forces and the Russian air forces. (haber7, 2015). Moreover, politicians often have the chance to dramatize and present the events as with substantial importance with an objective character and political urgency, since such events are constructed to propose a great deal of danger against the national security. The act of securitization allows the government to implement or justify its extraordinary policies, and even making policy decisions without the need of consulting the parliament (Buzan, et al., 1998, p. 25). Also, the strength of the securitization is that it masks the enunciator's specific historical and contestable nature by constructing security as an objective dehistoricized demand (Hansen, 2006, p. 30).

The main aim of this thesis is to have a more comprehensive understanding of the governing dynamics behind Turkey's differentiated foreign policy and perception of the Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish sub-state actors with the guidance of Hansen's theoretical framework. There are three main reasons why Hansen's model is chosen as the main framework of this thesis among other predominant explanations. First of all, Hansen's model clearly articulates linking and differentiation processes. Determining how an actor identifies itself and the others is the essential part of an identity based analysis, which reduces the complexity of the research for both the analyst and reader. Second, Hansen's research is more detailed than others. When investigating a complex phenomenon, providing in-depth details increases the awareness toward the circumstances surrounding the phenomenon which increases the comprehensibility of the case. Third, Hansen provides a detailed guideline for the reader. Hence, a step by step guideline makes the case more understandable, and the research model's iteration much simpler, especially for students.

Identities are constituted through the linking and differentiation of a series of definitive signs. Therefore, as Hansen suggests, the research starts with an identification of linking and differentiation processes with regard to the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds, which have been constructed by the AKP government. In other words, the first step is identifying the signs which are often repeated in basic discourses and those indicate a clear construction of the identities by a particular discourse (Hansen, 2006, p. 37). After determining the identities of Turkey, the KRG, and the PYD/YPG, constructed by Turkish authorities, the second step of the research is comparing these identities with the foreign policy behavior of Turkey, to see how coherent they are. Coherence between identity and policy indicates that constructed identities offer an explanatory basis for actor behavior.

The third step of the research is testing the stability of the discourses through key events in order to analyze the strength of the links between the identities and foreign policy. Hansen emphasizes the importance of key events since they have the potential to place themselves at the center of the political and media agenda, and influence the official policy – identity debates, or force the official discourse to engage with political or media criticisms. Mapping debates around key events offers an opportunity to test the stability of the official discourse (Hansen, 2006, p. 28). An important example of a key event that threatened the alliance between Turkey and the KRG is ISIS attacks on Erbil and Kobane in 2014. Since the AKP constructed the KRG's identity as Turkey's brother, it created an expectation among the Iraqi Kurds that the AKP would help them in case of an attack. The AKP's reluctance to help the Kurds against ISIS created serious disappointment and an unstable link between the Turkish discourse and foreign policy, so that the KRG had to ban its officials from commenting about the issue for the sake of the continuity of the alliance (Erkmen, 2014). There are several key events that occurred regarding Turkey and the Kurdish people living inside its borders and in the Middle East. This research would not focus on a single event, but rather provide an evaluation of discourses that follow several key events in a period that starts with the Syrian civil war. The key events identified in this research are (1) the PYD/YPG's unilateral declaration of autonomy, (2) ISIS attacks on Erbil and Kobane, and (3) Turkey's large scale military campaigns against ISIS and the PYD/YPG. The civil war in Syria caused surrounding actors', including Turkey and the KRG's, attention to focus on the political and territorial gains of the Syrian Kurds which allows us to study their political reactions to the phenomena. A long historical analysis enables researchers to trace the evolution of a discourse, thereby provides a better understanding of the formation of the links between identities and foreign policy (Hansen, 2006, p. 70). In the following chapters, readers can find more about the identified key events which took place after 2011, the start of the Syrian civil war, and how these events shaped the political debates or societal identities.

The meaning of a text is never fully given by the text itself, thus it is always a product or a renewed version of other readings. Discourses often contain metaphors and implications of wider meanings that belong to other texts, which refer to conceptual intertextuality. This is where the need for cultural and historical competence comes into play. Hence, in order to recognize the references and to locate them within a larger textual web that goes beyond other political texts into journalism, popular culture, non-fiction and even fiction genres (Hansen, 2006, pp. 49-51). This thesis would not conduct intertextual analysis. Instead, it only includes

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official texts and discourses since the goal is to explore the identity – foreign policy orientation of the government. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the statements given by the official sources such as leaders, incumbent political party representatives, members of the cabinet and ministry of foreign affairs. Discourse samples are gathered from a variety of sources. First, mainstream Turkish media such as Hürriyet, Milliyet, Sabah and Radikal newspapers are the main sources of data gathering since these newspapers had the highest circulation in Turkey during the time period that this research focuses on, and they are easily accessible nationwide. More than 1100 news pieces published in the abovementioned newspapers are scanned in order to identify related discourses of the Turkish officials. Second, records of parliamentary proceedings of the AKP are scanned in order to identify the related content. Around 60 parliamentary proceeding reports are scanned throughout the research process. Third, archives of parliamentary group meetings of the AKP are examined from the start of the Syrian civil war until the end of the research period, the summer of 2017. Hence, 123 of the AKP's group meeting archives are scanned. Fourth, various news websites including CNN, CNN Turk, Al-Jazeera, Rudaw, BBC and others are also added for diversifying the sources. After conducting the discourse analysis, one can expect to uncover how official discourse encounters criticism, and which discursive links are stable (Hansen, 2006, pp. 53-54).

In addition, discourse analysis requires from the analyst to have a basic level of cultural competence to recognize shared understandings that create a common frame. The main challenge for the observer is to avoid becoming part of the studied universe, or in other words to be "home blind", which prevents the observer from recognizing the puzzles (Neumann, 2008, p. 64). In social sciences, research cannot be purely objective since it is a product of human beings, and every individual is likely to have an identity and ideology. As an international relations student living in Turkey, it is safe to say that I have a certain degree of cultural competence and familiarity with the regional political environment. It is a researcher's job to conduct research as objectively as possible. Yet, it is never possible to achieve complete isolation from the studied universe; and the risk of subjectivity is even greater if one is studying his/her own country. The puzzle here is that there is a highly noticeable difference in Turkish foreign policy towards the two Kurdish political entities which are based right outside the Southeastern border, namely the KRG and the PYD/YPG. In Syria, the PYD/YPG is represented as a terrorist organization in the Turkish foreign policy discourse, while the KRG of Iraq is labeled as an ally. Hence, the goal of this research is to

explore the relationship between how the AKP government has formed Turkey's identity vis-à-vis these actors and what kind of a policy practice Turkey has pursued towards the KRG and the PYD/YPG.

1.4 Organization of the Chapters

The rest of the thesis continues with chapter two which contains; first, how the AKP presents Turkey's identity against the Iraqi Kurds in order to determine how the self is constructed (process of linking) and then it discusses how the Turkish officials describe the KRG in their statements which shows us the degree of marginalization of the other (process of differentiation). Chapter two also offers a comparison between the constructed identities and actor behavior to see if there is a correlation between the two.

Chapter three starts with brief information of the conflicting parties in the Syrian civil war and discusses; firstly, how the AKP constructs Turkish identity against the Syrian Kurds in order to determine how the self is constructed against the PYD/YPG. Secondly, this chapter offers how the Turkish authorities present the PYD/YPG in their statements which could help us determine the degree of differentiation from the self. Thirdly, chapter three offers a comparison between the constructed identities and actor behavior to see if there is a correlation. Chapter four provides a comparison about Turkey's behavior against the KRG and PYD/YPG, a summary of the major findings, offers directions for further research and concludes the thesis.

CHAPTER 2

Identity Construction and Foreign Policy towards The Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government

2.1 Brief history of the KRG – Turkey relations

Modern history of Iraq started with the Sykes – Picot Agreement in 1916. With the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1920, Iraq stayed under the British mandate until it attained independence as a kingdom in 1932. Iraqi Kurds' desire for autonomy dates back to the First World War. In 1918 they initiated an uprising against the British mandate, but they were defeated within a year. Also, in 1961, Iraqi Kurds, under the leadership of Mustafa Barzani, initiated another uprising which evolved into a full-fledged civil war against the Iraqi government that would last for ten years. In 1963, the nationalist Baath Party took control of the government with a coup, and continued fighting against the Kurds until 1970. When both sides realized that the war reached a stalemate, the Baath party government recognized the existence of the Kurds and promised them autonomy, which led to signing of a peace agreement between the Iraqi Kurds and the Baath Party government in 1970. However, the dispute over sharing the oil-rich Kirkuk city started to change the course of the relations, and two parties failed to come to an agreement, which gave way to another armed conflict (Eliassi, 2013).

Under Saddam Hussein's rule, the Iraqi Kurds suffered greatly due to armed conflicts, mass executions, genocide, chemical attacks and deportations conducted by the government

forces (Eliassi, 2013). Despite all the difficulties, the two Gulf wars provided opportunities for the Kurds to increase their power. After Iraq's defeat in the first Gulf War in 1991, the Kurds started a revolt, and government forces suppressed them with violence. Consequently, tens of thousands of Kurds' fleeing to the mountains caused a humanitarian crisis, which led the UN (United Nations) to impose a no-fly zone to protect the refugees in northern Iraq after the suggestion of the Turkish government. Turkey's support for the imposition of the no-fly zone has led to the formation of close connections with the Iraqi Kurds, and these developments paved the way for an increasingly autonomous Iraqi Kurdish structure in northern Iraq. In 1992, the Iraqi Kurdistan Front, an alliance of Kurdish political parties, held parliamentary and presidential elections, and established the Kurdistan Regional Government. Even though Turkey considered an autonomous Kurdish zone in Iraq as a national security threat due to its domestic Kurdish issue, two parties became de facto allies as Turkey supported the Kurds in their difficult times in order to gain influence over them, to get assistance from them in resolving its domestic Kurdish issue, and to avoid a possible refugee overflow should the Iraqi government strike the Kurds again. (Gunter, 1993, p. 305). Hence, Turkey approved the UN forces to use its military facilities as a base for the humanitarian intervention, but added a clause to the agreement that stressed the integrity of Iraq (Gunter, 1993, p. 303). Turkey's approval brought two sides even closer which led to reciprocal visits and statements of contentedness. Besides, at a time when the Iraqi Kurds were struggling with heavy economic difficulties, the cross border trade of goods and oil with Turkey enabled them to pay salaries and to provide a basic level of social services to the public.

Turkey's perception of the Iraqi Kurds as a national security threat was rooted in two signed accords of solidarity between the Iraqi Kurds and the PKK in 1983 and 1989 (Gunter, 1993, pp. 304-305). The accords enabled the PKK to establish their headquarters in northern Iraq, and to move their trained militants to the region. However, the alliance between the PKK and the Iraqi Kurds started to worsen soon both because of the Turkish pressure and the PKK's violence toward women, children as well as the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) members. In the summer of 1992, the KDP imposed a blockade against the PKK camps along the Turkish border and the PKK responded effectively by sabotaging the trade routes between Turkey and northern Iraq. In October 1992, the KDP initiated a large offensive against the PKK, and after Turkey's participation in the military operations, the PKK had to surrender on the 29th of October. During this period, thousands of PKK militants fled to Iran, Turkey and Syria, and approximately 500 of them were captured by the KDP. After the surrender, the

PKK was forced to withdraw from the border areas to the Sulaymaniyah region in the south. Even though this joint military operation rejuvenated the trust between Turkey and the KDP, on the Turkish side, the Iraqi Kurds' refusal to hand over the captured PKK fighters created disappointment and suspicion about whether the KDP was working with both sides (Gunter, 1993, pp. 307-308).

During the second Gulf War in 2003, the Peshmerga (military forces of the KRG) fought alongside the US, led coalition forces against the Iraqi government, and took control of many cities in the north including Kirkuk. After Saddam Hussein was overthrown, Iraqis accepted the recognition of the semi-autonomous KRG government in a national referendum in 2005 (KRG, 2017). Before the US invasion of Iraq, on the 1st of March 2003, the TBMM denied the US request of Turkish military's participation in the invasion and of using Turkish military facilities as a base for the US operations. In fact, after the invasion of Iraq, in October 2003, in accordance with the US demands, the TBMM authorized the deployment of the Turkish military into Iraq. However, this decision was harshly criticized and protested by the Iraqi Kurds which suggests that Turkey was perceived as an existential threat by them, despite the history of close cooperation during the 1990s (Somer, 2005, p. 115).

Ironically, Turkey also initially considered the KRG as a threat to its existence due to its domestic Kurdish question. In the earlier years, relations between the AKP government and the KRG were not as quite positive as it is today. The tension was due to two reasons: First, the PKK presence in northern Iraq, more specifically on the Qandil Mountains, as well as the KRG's alleged support for the PKK militants were perceived as a serious threat to Turkish national security. According to the AKP, the KRG was allowing the PKK to establish checkpoints in its region, releasing the arrested PKK militants after a short period, and reopening the closed PKK offices in the next door (CrisisGroup, 2008, p. 9). In addition, the KRG's annexation of Kirkuk in the post-war Iraq was not welcomed by Turkey. The AKP officials believed that the KRG was allowing the PKK attacks in order to provoke a large scale military operation from Turkey into northern Iraq. As a result, the AKP claimed that the KRG was planning to isolate Turkey from the international community, and gain advantage over the dispute of Kirkuk by using the PKK as leverage (Davutoğlu, 2008, pp. 84-88). Second, the political and territorial gains of the Iraqi Kurds after the Second Gulf War made their independence dreams more than a possibility for the KRG, which revived a long standing existential threat for Turkey. The government perceived that an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq might encourage the Kurds in Turkey for a similar achievement. The

dissatisfaction of Turkish authorities against the KRG policies was also reflected on the official discourse which implied that the KRG was harboring and supporting terrorists, the PKK (Görener, 2008, p. 3). During this period, Turkey's discourse about the KRG was in line with the persistent cross border operations conducted into northern Iraq by the Turkish air forces between December 2007 and February 2008, threats of a large scale military operation and implementation of an economic embargo against the KRG.

During 2007 – 2008, the opposition parties in Turkey; CHP (Republican People's Party) and MHP (Nationalist Action Party), as well as the Turkish Armed Forces were advocating a hardline approach to deter the KRG from sheltering the PKK militants. However, the AKP began to view the issue from a different angle. The AKP officials came to an understanding that in the post-Gulf war era, after the withdrawal of the US military is complete, structural transformation of Iraq into a federal state was inevitable. Hence, the AKP viewed the KRG as in need of a viable partner in security and trade to guarantee its future (CrisisGroup, 2008, p. 1). Turkey, as a country neighboring Europe and a candidate of joining the EU, constituted the best option to transfer and sell hydro carbon resources for the KRG in comparison to Baghdad and Tehran. On the other side, Turkey would also benefit from the natural resource trade that comes from northern Iraq, and a new market for the Turkish companies to gain profit.

After the KRG's semi-autonomous governmental institutions were officially recognized with the new Iraqi Constitution in 2005, there appeared a conflict of interests between the KRG and the Iraqi central government under the leadership of Prime Minister al-Maliki. First, there were disputed territories between the KRG and the Iraqi government in northern Iraq, such as Kirkuk and Khanaqin, which increased tensions between these two actors, even reaching to the level of armed conflict (Wilgenburg, 2012). Since the northern Iraqi territories are oil-rich, it seems inevitable to have such disputes in the areas adjacent to the Kurdish region. Correspondingly, the second major dispute was about how to share the oil revenues between Iraq and the KRG. Barzani began to export crude oil independently to the World through the Kirkuk – Yumurtalık pipeline from May 2014 onwards, and did not share its revenues with the central government as they had agreed (Şahin, 2014), while the Iraqi central government also failed to keep its end of the bargain. This issue also caused tension between the Turkish and Iraqi governments (T24, 2013), because first, the use of the Kirkuk-Yumurtalık pipeline increased Turkish influence over Barzani, as the KRG was becoming

more and more economically dependent on Turkey. Second, the Iraqi government also accused Turkey of trying to intervene in its internal affairs (Malone, 2012).

From 2007 onwards, Turkey and the KRG identified each other as close allies, until the summer of 2017 when discussions about the KRG's upcoming independence referendum began, and Erdoğan became the first Turkish leader ever who visited Erbil in March 2011 (Aqrawi, 2011). In return, both President and Prime Minister of the KRG paid several visits to Turkey. It is even argued that the KRG started to think of achieving full independence with such a strong Turkish support behind (Gunter, 2013, p. 446). Considering that Erdoğan used to address the KRG President Barzani as a tribal leader just a decade ago (Hurriyet, 2007), the post-2007 situation signals a fundamental evolution in Turkey's discourse and foreign policy.

The recent situation shows that interactions between Turkey and the KRG have been quite peaceful for some time. This peaceful relationship has two main reasons. Firstly, strong economic partnership between Turkey and the KRG indicates that both parties are in need of such an economic activity. Thus, the KRG is located on an ocean of oil with an under-developed industry and has limited capabilities in any other sector. This generates a significant vulnerability by mainly relying on oil revenues and pipelines passing through Turkey, which are the easiest way for the KRG to export oil. This kind of a heavy reliance on a single source of revenue causes the KRG to become increasingly dependent on Turkey, also at the same time economic dependence enhances the influence of Turkey over the KRG (Dettmer, 2016), enabling Turkey to use the KRG for pressuring the Kurds in Syria and in Turkey.

Secondly, from the perspective of the AKP, Turkey has embraced the role of being an 'energy hub' and crossroads for the pipelines that are already active and/or are projected to come from the Trans Caspian Basin, the Gulf, Russia and Iran, which require a secure environment. Furthermore, transferring rich oil resources from northern Iraq necessitates full cooperation with the KRG, which is about to become an important player in energy policies (Çandar, 2009, p. 15). Apparently, Turkey needs to create a peaceful environment both internally and externally in order to be a reliable partner of the energy trade. Based on this perspective, Turkey's internal Kurdish issue transcends the borders and affects its relations with the international community. The presence of Kurds in the neighboring countries causes vulnerabilities for Turkey, since a foreign policy choice always has the possibility to influence domestic politics or vice versa. For example, the Turkish government's reluctance in

supporting the Kurdish forces during the siege of Kobane in Syria, in September 2014, caused mass protests in the Southeastern region of Turkey which resulted in 42 civilian casualties and 800 injuries (Radikal, 2014a). Additionally, the Kurdish issue has constituted an important obstacle in Turkey's path of development because it requires lots of military/economic resources, and damages the country's international image as the Turkish government aims to display the image of a democratic state. However, it is difficult to talk about democracy when minorities claim that the government is oppressing them. We have witnessed Turkey's failed attempts to resolve the Kurdish issue, and now the AKP government seems to be back on the hardline approach. After the failure of the 2009 democratic opening initiative and the settlement process, President Erdoğan declared that Turkey did not have a Kurdish issue, identified the problem as merely an issue of terrorism and rejected to negotiate with the terrorists (Tait, 2011). Also, Turkey has been relying on the KRG's influence among the Kurdish community as a mediator to achieve peace with the PKK which also created tension between the PKK and the KRG (Gunter, 2013, p. 450). Apparently, this also indicates that the KRG has managed to have an indispensable position for Turkey in the region and vice versa.

The rise of the PYD/YPG during the Syrian civil war also constituted a discontent on both Turkey and the KRG. The emergence of the PYD/YPG as the strongest Kurdish political actor in Syria posed a threat to the interests of Turkey and KRG at the same time, and forced them to partner up (Kayhan Pusane, 2016). Especially after the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the PYD/YPG's gains undermined Turkey's and the KRG's influence over the region. From the Turkish perspective, a powerful PYD/YPG proposes a national security threat due to its close connection to the PKK. In addition, the political rivalry in Syria between political parties connected to the KRG and the PYD/YPG over controlling the Kurds in Rojava creates tension among the two major Kurdish actors.

The strong influence of the US is also difficult to neglect when evaluating the relations between Turkey and the KRG. Turkey – US relations were at its lowest point after the TBMM's refusal to participate in the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Turkey has been pressuring the US for receiving its support in the struggle against the PKK in northern Iraq since then. However, Turkey's demand was not realized for quite some time since the US channeled almost all its resources to the Southern parts of Iraq and did not want to risk losing its Kurdish allies in the North (Görener, 2008, p. 4). It was finally in November 2007 when Erdoğan visited Washington, that former US President George W. Bush declared his support for Turkey with regard to its fight against terrorism and that two parties signed an agreement

to share intelligence about the PKK activity in the region. After Turkish-American bilateral relations improved once again, the US started to work closely with Turkey (Görener, 2008, p. 4). During this period, the US also encouraged Turkey to improve its relations with the KRG. However, Turkish military's robust influence over the decision making processes and advocacy of hardline approach towards the Iraqi Kurds prevented the formation of a consistent policy towards northern Iraq between 2005 and 2007. Hence, a change in the balance of power in Turkish civil – military relations towards the former made the rapprochement between Turkey and the KRG possible (Kayhan Pusane, 2017, pp. 12-17). Therefore, the shift in civil – military balance of power combined with the US' mediation efforts to lower the tension between Turkey and the KRG, and the US support in fighting against the PKK decreased the criticisms among the domestic actors in Turkey, and provided an opportunity for the AKP to cooperate with the KRG without getting labeled as traitors among the nationalist circles (Görener, 2008, p. 4).

2.2 Analysis of the Relationship between the KRG and Turkey since 2011

Turkey presented itself as a committed candidate country for joining the EU in the first decade of the AKP period. However, after the failure of the Kurdish Opening, Turkey's relations with the West have become increasingly problematic, and relations with the Islamic world have started to be prioritized accordingly (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2008, pp. 69-70). The first step of the discourse analysis in Hansen's research model is the identification of the linking process which consists of repeating self-descriptions. Firstly, according to the identification of the linking process, during this period, neo-Ottoman references in the AKP discourse are encountered as an important feature in Turkish foreign policy. For instance, former Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, refers to different ethnic groups in Iraq and Syria as a historical heritage from the Ottoman Empire, and adds that Turkey is determined to protect them if necessary (TRT, 2014). Hence, such an approach could be used as an attempt to justify Turkey's involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts by claiming that Turkey has the right to defend any of the ethnic groups residing in the region, since their ancestors were Ottoman citizens. Additionally, Davutoğlu's book "*Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position*" (2001) argues that Turkey is at the center of several geocultural basins such as the West, the Middle East and Central Asia, which can enable Turkey to emerge as a

global power by implementing an active diplomacy, having good relations with its neighbors and recognizing its historical and cultural ties (Aras, 2009, p. 130). Davutoğlu's book has also been widely criticized as having neo-Ottoman inclinations since it emphasizes the importance of former Ottoman territories. However, the author rejected these criticisms in 2010 by arguing that his book explained Turkey's recent pro-active foreign policy vision with the necessities of historical responsibility and geographical continuity, and that these descriptions cannot be accounted as having a neo-Ottoman ideology (Davutoğlu, 2010).

Secondly, being at equal distance to any societal group is one of the most used self-descriptive phrases by various AKP officials in the foreign policy discourse towards the Middle East. In short, it is safe to say that the AKP describes Turkey as a non-discriminatory political actor. Presenting the Self as a non-discriminating actor provides the AKP discourse with a justifiable explanatory basis for Turkish foreign policy regarding its close ties with the KRG in Iraq; the Turkmen population in Iraq and Syria, Arab dominated FSA (Free Syrian Army) and the SNC (Syrian National Council).

Thirdly, the AKP defines Turkey as a humanitarian actor, who is ethically responsible for helping the victims of violence in the Middle East (İHA, 2012). Specifically in Syria, Turkish authorities argue that the public is victimized by the Assad regime, the PYD and ISIS, and in need of international support due to the ongoing civil war for more than seven years. Defending a humanitarian stance makes it possible for the AKP government to legitimize its interference with Middle Eastern conflicts such as providing logistical support for the opposition forces in Syria, establishing a military base in Iraq, intervening when necessary and opening the borders for a large number of refugees who flee from the conflict zones. For example, two Turkish Prime Ministers of 2014; Erdoğan's and Davutoğlu's speeches in the TBMM contain self-descriptions of non-discriminatory and humanitarian properties. Erdoğan stated "We do not see the issues in Iraq and Syria from a sectarian perspective; we see them from the angle of equality and justice" (Erdoğan, 2014a). Also Davutoğlu declared "In Syria and in the World, we will stand against the cruel and beside the victims, without considering their identity, sect and religion. Turkey is a mother's bosom for those who seek mercy and compassion" (Davutoğlu, 2014a). At a party group meeting in October 2014, Davutoğlu emphasized non-discriminatory properties when describing the AKP ideology as a political movement that embraces democratic plurality, views every person and ideology with a similar amount of respect and empathy (Davutoğlu, 2014b). Also, in November 2014, Davutoğlu

described Turkey as a brave actor which addresses the cruel actors as they are, and supports the victims equally, without considering their differences (Davutoğlu, 2014c) (Davutoğlu, 2014d).

Table 1 AKP's Identity Construction of Turkey and Foreign Policy Discourse

Discourse	Neo-Ottoman	Humanitarian	Non-discriminatory
Foreign policy argument	Makes Turkey responsible for defending the people of Iraq and Syria as an historical heritage from the Ottoman Empire.	Implies that Turkey is willing to help the victims of war. Also emphasizes that Turkey will stand against the cruel actors.	Implies that Turkey is at an equal distance to every actor in the region, without considering their religious and ethnic identity.
Foreign policy correlation	Justifies Turkey's involvement in the civil war.	Justifies hosting around 3 million refugees and Turkey's involvement in the civil war.	Explains why Turkey is in an alliance with the KRG. Justifies Turkey's involvement in the civil war.

However, the concept of humanitarian intervention has always been debatable due to the arguments of interfering with the internal affairs of the target state. In this sense, the AKP's logistical support for the Sunni dominated opposition groups such as the FSA and SNC caused a negative reaction from the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, as he opposed Turkey's behavior as intervention into the internal affairs of Syria (Çakırözer, 2012). It has been argued that the revival of Turkey's internal PKK problem is directly linked with its ongoing support for the Syrian opposition groups as a counter measure from the Syrian government (Aras, 2011, p. 50). On the other hand, Turkey has been hosting a considerable

number of Syrian refugees, and this policy is in line with the AKP's humanitarian discourse. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency's report, by May 2017 around 3 million Syrian refugees took shelter in Turkey (UNHCR, 2017).

The purpose of this section is to present Turkey's discursive construction of its identity vis-à-vis the Iraqi Kurds by showing which signs are articulated by a particular discourse or text. As Hansen puts it, clarifying the processes of linking and differentiation allows for a structured and systematic analysis of how discourses seek to construct stability, where they become unstable, how they can be deconstructed and the processes through which they change (Hansen, 2006, p. 40). Also, the formation of identities cannot be independent from the perceived political and socio-economic circumstances which are apprehended as systemic structures. Actors are forced to behave within the perceived structural limitations and in return they consolidate the structures in play. For instance, when we consider the present circumstances such as economic dependence and the relative difference in size and capabilities of Turkey and the KRG, these variables increase the cost of acting against the interests of Turkey to a practically unaffordable level from the perspective of the KRG. A combination of the actor's perceived identity, power, and presence of the common interests makes cooperation a much more rational strategy in this case. Therefore, the identities are reciprocally built with positive (compatible) definitions which operate simultaneously as the architect and product of the alliance between Turkey and the KRG. Accordingly, compatible definition of identities characterizes the associated group interests as positive-sum[2] (Somer, 2005, p. 118) which explains the motivation behind the actors' intentions of forming an alliance at various levels. It is natural that both actors are expecting to benefit from the alliance. In turn, actors' overlapping cooperative behavior with their identification of each other, supported by the discourses, consolidates those interests and identities in question. Hence, when we look at the findings of our discourse analysis, from 2011 onwards, the AKP did not marginalize the KRG as it is compatible with its interests and foreign policy.

Identities are constructed through an articulation of a number of repetitive signs. In Hansen's model, discourse analysis has to proceed methodologically by investigating the constructions of identity and the formulation of policies within a given debate (Hansen, 2006, p. 27). Thus, identification of the differentiation process, which refers to how the AKP

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[2] The definition of positive-sum, in game theory, is that total gains and losses are greater than zero. Thus, all participants expect that their needs will be met.

constructs the identity of the KRG from 2007 onwards, constitutes the second step of this discourse analysis. First, the most encountered term in the AKP discourse is trust, where the KRG is presented as a credible ally. For example, during the siege of Kobane, former Prime Minister Davutoğlu stated that Turkey let the Peshmerga forces through Turkish borders in order to aid the defense of the city as a result of the mutual trust between Turkey and the KRG (AlJazeera, 2014). Furthermore, during a TV show on the Turkish state television, TRT, Davutoğlu said "Our Iraqi Kurdish brothers and we have gone through some difficult times, but there is no more suspicion, only mutual trust and belief that given promises will be kept" (Milliyet, 2014).

Second, the references of brotherhood or being brothers is another often used reference for the KRG, in terms of being a brother nation, and also frequently used in personally addressing the leaders of the KRG and vice versa. Constructing the identity of the KRG as brothers could be depicted as a sign of commitment to provide aid when needed. Leaders of the two actors, Erdoğan and Barzani, frequently addressed each other as brothers in the statements given to the media between 2007 and 2017, which put the emphasis on the close diplomatic relations and determination to carry it forward. Also, with regard to the political uncertainties in Iraq, the AKP vice president Hüseyin Çelik once said "If Iraq is going to get divided, which seems inevitable, the KRG will be our brothers" (Radikal, 2014b).

The notion of brotherhood in the official Turkish discourse is used to build a common identity between Turks and Iraqi Kurds as well. For example, in 2013 former Prime Minister (and then President) Erdoğan said "We are brothers, we were brothers from all eternity, and we will be for ever and ever. We are the children of the same land and same civilization" (Sabah, 2013). Also, Davutoğlu, in his meeting with the Prime Minister of the KRG, Necirvan Barzani, stated "Our languages are brothers, which were used together on the same streets, cities and lands by the people who greet and embrace each other" (Hurriyet, 2014b). Turkish discourse of brotherhood, which emphasizes a thousand year-old coexistence, tries to build a common historical identity for further cooperation.

It is difficult to claim that the KRG is differentiated as the marginal Other until the summer of 2017. The Turkish government constructed a non-threatening, friendly image for the KRG as presented above. Also, Turkish foreign policy, together with its discourse and identity, is compatible with these constructed identities of the Iraqi Kurds. As the next step of

this research, this thesis will identify the links between the constructed identities and foreign policy.

As mentioned earlier, it has been argued that there is an alliance between Turkey and the KRG which focuses on three main subjects: Turkey's fight against the PKK, economic partnership between Turkey and the KRG, and finally the rise of the PYD/YPG in Syria after the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011. To begin with, the KRG supported the Kurdish Opening process from 2009 onward, and tried to be part of the negotiations in order to gain leverage against Turkey in the bilateral disputes. With the PKK headquarters based in northern Iraq, Turkey realized during this period that without the KRG's support, it would not be able to stop the PKK attacks (Aras, 2011, p. 611). Hence, due to his popularity among the Kurds, the AKP government decided to involve the KRG leader Barzani in the latest part of the settlement process in 2012 as an influential figure. Yet this was not welcomed by the PKK front since Barzani's KDP and the PKK have been historical rivals (Kayhan Pusane, 2016, p. 23). When Barzani and Erdoğan spoke in the historic Diyarbakır meeting in November 2013, they both emphasized the necessity of peace. On the PKK front, the involvement of another Kurdish leader to the settlement process was perceived as a "divide and rule" strategy since Erdoğan's move was considered as an attempt to exploit the intra-Kurdish political conflicts and to undermine the influence of the PKK and its leader Öcalan (Çandar, 2013). During the discourse analysis process, I have come across similar patterns both in the AKP and KRG discourses regarding the Kurdish question of Turkey. Similar discursive patterns are an indication of the AKP's precision in constructing the KRG identity in terms of credibility and brotherhood, and also an indication of Barzani's dedication to work with Turkey. However, one can argue that the KRG's coherent discourse with the Turkish government is a potential source of tension between the PKK and KRG. For example, during a dispute between the KRG and PKK regarding whether northern Iraq should be governed by a single center of power or not, one of the PKK's leading figures, Duran Kalkan, accused Barzani of being a dictator. As an answer, Barzani argued that the PKK is a separatist and traitor organization, just as the Turkish officials have identified the PKK for years (Hurriyet, 2015b). With the alliance between Turkey and the KRG developing in every field, Iraqi Kurds have started to pursue a more anti-PKK approach in accordance with Turkish interests and with the identities attributed by the AKP leaders. The KRG has banned pro-PKK political parties, arrested its politicians, closed down the PKK offices in its territory and closely monitored the PKK activities (Tol, 2013). The PKK's discomfort about the alliance between Turkey and the KRG

could be noticed in an interview by a Spanish newspaper with Cemil Bayık, who is a PKK leader located on the Qandil Mountains. In this interview, Bayık stated that "Barzani has been doing whatever Turkey asks" (Hurriyet, 2014).

In recent years, the PYD/YPG has attained a serious degree of political and territorial gains in Syria mainly in connection to the civil war. Thus, common interests in containing the rise of the PYD/YPG in order to prevent it from dominating Syrian politics and from expanding its territories motivated Turkey and the KRG for an alliance. The KRG's concerns for PYD/YPG's empowerment resulted in a series of precautions to be taken. In 2011, Barzani promoted the unification of the Syrian Kurdish groups except PYD/YPG under the name of the Kurdish National Congress (KNC). Barzani also led the way to the signing of the Erbil Agreement in 2012, to set up a power sharing accord between the PYD/YPG and KNC. Yet, the agreement was never implemented. The tensions between the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds began to rise as the PYD/YPG banned the Peshmerga forces from Rojava, and as a response the KRG closed the Iraqi – Syrian border to prevent the transportation of humanitarian aid into Syria (Kayhan Pusane, 2016, p. 24). Barzani also decided to dig up a trench along the border which increased the tension even further. The KRG asserted that the trench was to prevent illegal crossings and also accused the PYD/YPG for working with illegal groups. Consequently, the Syrian Kurds organized mass protests while the PYD/YPG argued that the trench was aimed to suppress and weaken the Syrian Kurds (Radikal, 2014c). Against the PYD/YPG, we also see a common discourse orated by the AKP and the KRG. When Davutoğlu visited Erbil in 2012, himself and Barzani released a joint notice by declaring "We will act together against any group that exploits the absence of authority in Syria", which could be considered as a clear warning for the PYD/YPG (Çamlıbel, 2012). The PYD/YPG's unilateral declaration of autonomy in 2013 could be considered as a key event in recognizing how the KRG and Turkey differentiate the PYD/YPG, since it placed itself at the top of the agenda as both actors opposed the PYD/YPG's declaration severely. Also, both Turkey's and the KRG's efforts to marginalize the PYD/YPG gained momentum after the unilateral declaration of autonomy. Barzani argued that the PYD/YPG was in alliance with the al-Assad government, and identified this situation as deceitfulness (Çamlıbel, 2013). Similar statements were also made by the Turkish government, claiming that the PYD/YPG was in alliance with the Assad government and ISIS (Hurriyet, 2015c). Also, the AKP made several claims about the PYD/YPG – PKK affiliation (i.e. the PYD/YPG constitutes the Syrian affiliate of the PKK) and identified the PYD/YPG as a terrorist organization. In line with the statements of

the AKP government, in March of 2016, Barzani claimed that the PYD/YPG and the PKK were the same organization operating in different states (Sabah, 2016).[3] One can argue that this common discourse against the rise of the PYD/YPG in Syria is an indication of the AKP – KRG partnership and the KRG's overlapping behavior with the identification ascribed by the AKP.

What's more, the economic partnership between Turkey and the KRG has been gradually expanding every year since 2007. Booming economic activity can be summarized with the KRG becoming the third largest export market of Turkey with $8 billion in 2013, while it was only $1.4 billion in 2007. Also, between 2009 and 2013 the number of Turkish companies operating in the KRG increased from 485 to 1500 (Çağaptay, et al., 2015). Besides, Turkey's energy dependence constitutes a strategic importance with its energy hungry industrial sector which has an annual energy consumption increase around 8 percent. Russia and Iran are the two major energy suppliers of Turkey. Therefore, Turkey's heavy energy reliance on Russia and Iran limits its diplomatic freedom in the region, and consequently forces Turkey to diversify its energy suppliers in order to sustain its economic growth (Tol, 2013). The discovery of massive hydrocarbon resources in the KRG territories in 2011 also has an essential part in the changing relations with Turkey. Ankara used to support Baghdad against the KRG, but with Baghdad's slow steps regarding the hydrocarbon law negotiations changed the nature of the relations since it started to damage Turkey's economic interests (Barkey, 2011, p. 670). In 2013, an agreement was signed between the KRG and Turkey, and Iraqi oil began to be shipped from Turkey to the international markets in the next year. Erbil's independent oil trade created discontent in Baghdad; thereby an agreement was signed between the two in 2014. According to the agreement, the KRG was expected to provide Baghdad 550.000 barrels of oil per day; in return, the Iraqi government would give the KRG 17 percent of its national budget in monthly payments. However, from 2015 onwards the KRG continued to by-pass Baghdad in oil trade with Turkey, and due to this situation, the Iraqi government stopped paying the KRG's share from the budget (Kayhan Pusane, 2016). Erbil and Baghdad blamed each other for not complying with the terms of the agreement, and eventually its implementation was cancelled.

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[3] For relevant examples and full speeches, please see the AKP group meeting reports on 23.2.2016, 22.3.2016, 26.4.2016. Accessible at: http://www.akparti.org.tr/tbmm/haberler/kategori/grup-konusmalari/407

Table 2 AKP's Foreign Policy Discourse towards the KRG

	KRG
Discourse	Non-marginal, described as a reliable brother
Foreign policy	Increased economic activity, cooperation against the PKK and the PYD/YPG

In sum, the AKP's constructed identities vis-à-vis the Iraqi Kurds are closely connected to the implementation of Turkish foreign policy in relation with these identities. The harmony between the identities and foreign policy indicates that constructed identities have an influence over actor behavior which makes the bilateral alliance possible. In return, dedication of the actors to the alliance consolidates those identities constructed by the AKP. Surely, the bilateral partnership offers positive-sum outcomes for its participants. The KRG, on the one hand, is enjoying the presence of Turkish companies and products in its territory, easy access to international markets through Turkey, and also receiving serious amount of profits from the independent oil exports. The AKP, on the other hand, has been enjoying the diversification of energy suppliers, a new market for its bourgeoisie, and gaining profit from transporting the KRG oil into international markets. In this case, it is safe to argue that mutual interests have a role in constructing non-marginal identities against the significant Other, which in return result in an alteration of threat perceptions of the AKP towards the Iraqi Kurds. The economic, political, and military gains of the KRG do not constitute a threat for the Turkish government. In fact, Turkey's participation in a multi-layered positive-sum alliance with the Iraqi Kurds consolidates and supports such gains of the KRG. It seems unlikely that such an ever-deepening alliance would produce marginalizing differentiations without any key events that might change the course of the relations. The next section will discuss the stability of the discourses which connect identities and foreign policy in light of a number of key events that affect the bilateral relations.

Additionally, Turkey has been engaging in an armed conflict against the PKK since the early 1980s, and clearly describes the Kurdish organization as a threat to its national security. The KRG's history of political rivalry against the PKK, the history of armed

conflicts between them, its cooperation with the AKP against the latter and discursive radicalization of the latter have a role in shaping Turkey's perception towards the KRG positively. On the other hand, according to the discourses of the AKP officials, Turkey perceives a security threat from the political and territorial gains of the PYD/YPG in Syria. As Buzan et al. (1998) explain, security is a subjective practice and is highly connected with the operation of identities. Thus, the perceived security threat, which comes from the PYD/YPG, is closely connected to the Turkish government's identity construction vis-à-vis the PYD/YPG. The AKP discourse and foreign policy towards the PYD/YPG will be discussed in the next chapter in order to separate the cases for a clear comparison.

2.3 Key Events and Potential Challenges for the Alliance

The identities, discursively presented by the Turkish government, made the multi-layered alliance between Turkey and the KRG possible; thereby they could assist us in discussing the future of the strategic partnership. Surely, it would be pretentious to make a claim of predicting future developments which might affect the alliance, but current bilateral relations as well as regional circumstances provide a framework of what to expect. The embracement of the energy hub role requires Turkey to have closer ties with its new, oil rich neighbor and also a safer domestic and international environment. Thus, the KRG is the safest zone in the unstable Iraq, and constitutes a reliable buffer zone for Turkey. The security of the KRG, as an oil rich buffer zone, appears to be in the interests of Turkey which is also overlapping with the constructed identities of the KRG. The attributed identity of brotherhood for the KRG implies that Turkey is committed to support its Kurdish brothers when they are in need. This commitment also signals Turkey's need for security for its own survival. As an example, former Prime Minister Davutoğlu said "If Turkey does not want to be neighbors with ISIS, we must support Erbil" (BBC, 2015). Statements which are referring to notions of mutual trust, brotherhood and cooperation between the parties encouraged the KRG in the way of independence. Also, in 2015 President Erdoğan stated that independence claims of the KRG did not concern Turkey, because they were internal issues of the Iraqi government (Rudaw, 2015). Therefore, Barzani seemed to be confident with the close relations he had developed with Turkey by stating that the AKP would not oppose the KRG's self-determination claims (BBC, 2016). However, the KRG's indispensible position for Turkey

has started to change after Barzani's announcement of holding an independence referendum in September 2017. The KRG has been the target of severe criticisms and sanctions by the international community including Turkey, Iran and the Iraqi government. These developments provided an opportunity to test the stability of the identities constructed by the AKP government and attributed to the Iraqi Kurds.

Despite Erdoğan's abovementioned statement of neutrality against the KRG's independence claims, in the summer of 2017, we have witnessed Turkey's severe opposition to the independence referendum of the KRG. For instance, Erdoğan commented "We were wrong; we did not expect that Barzani would make such a mistake and betray our country when our relations were better than ever" (Hurriyet, 2017b). This statement is an indication that formerly attributed non-marginal identities of the KRG were constructed to serve the purpose of gaining domestic and international support for the implemented foreign policies. When interests of Turkey changed, one can notice the efforts of constructing a new identity for Barzani, which implied treason to the bilateral alliance, in order to fix the unstable link between the AKP's former discourse and current foreign policy. Consequently, the Turkish armed forces conducted a joint military exercise with the Iraqi army, which was interpreted as a warning against Barzani. Additionally, Erdoğan declared that the Turkish government was considering the implementation of a series of sanctions including closing the border gates and freezing the oil trade with the KRG (Milliyet, 2017a). These sanctions overlap with the new identity construction of the KRG's betrayal to the bilateral alliance. Moreover, the Iraqi army captured Kirkuk from the KRG in October 2017. Even though the Iraqi Kurds voted yes for full independence in September, abovementioned reactions forced Masoud Barzani to suspend implementation of the referendum results, and caused him to resign from his position of power.

The Kurdish independence seems unlikely in the near future. It is difficult for the KRG to achieve independence without the consent of the regional powers like Turkey, Iran and global powers like the US and Russia, which the KRG is heavily dependent on the matters of economics and security. Also, the US, Russia and Iran have often emphasized the importance of Iraq's territorial integrity, which implies that global and regional actors would not approve the KRG's independence claims (Milliyet, 2017b) (Hurriyet, 2017c). The KRG clearly wants an ethnicity based federal Iraq in which the Kurds are in control of the northern region. Ethnicity based federations institutionalize and indirectly promote ethnic divisions, creates new minorities within the current ones, and therefore they are more prone to conflicts

(Somer, 2005, p. 123). Hence, a possible conflict between Kurds and Turkmens, or Kurds and Arabs in Iraq would potentially deteriorate Turkey's relations with the KRG (Somer, 2005, p. 123), and undermine the mutual compatible definitions between the actors which could lead to the end of the bilateral alliance. Based on the aforementioned reasons, neither Turkey nor the US would risk a war based on ethnicities in Iraq. Besides, possible bitter relations with the KRG could reflect up on Turkey's domestic Kurdish issue due to resonant identities of the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey, and thereby might cause intra-state security threats and instability for the AKP. Another issue that might potentially affect the relations with the KRG is Turkey's domestic Kurdish question. The armed struggle between Turkey and the PKK frequently causes Turkey to conduct cross border operations and especially air strikes on Qandil Mountains. The end of the peace talks with the PKK in 2015 has triggered a series of armed conflicts. As a result, several waves of air strikes were carried out in northern Iraq against the PKK targets by the Turkish military and caused several civilian casualties as well. Consequently, Barzani criticized both the PKK and Turkey for escalating the violence (Ergan, 2015a). Therefore, as the struggle continues between Turkey and the PKK, it has a possibility to harm the relations between the AKP and the KRG in the future.

Furthermore, mutually constructed identity of brotherhood and close cooperation between the KRG and Turkey naturally created an expectation among the Iraqi Kurds that Turkey would protect the KRG in case of an attack that is likely to come from ISIS or the central government in Baghdad (Erkmen, 2014). For instance, Davutoğlu defined Turkey in 2016 as the biggest friend and protector of the KRG in the region (Davutoğlu, 2016a). Nonetheless, when ISIS attacked Erbil in August 2014, Turkey's reluctance in helping the KRG caused disappointment and frustration among the Iraqi Kurds. Although Turkey presented the hostage situation with ISIS at the Turkish Consulate General in Mosul as the reason of its reluctance, it failed to satisfy the KRG and could not repair the trust issues towards Turkey[4] (Erkmen, 2014). As a result, the discrepancy between the AKP discourse and foreign policy diminished Turkey's reliability among the Iraqi Kurds. Thus, the KRG had to impose restrictions on its members about giving statements to the press regarding the subject in order to protect the partnership with the AKP. Only the KRG President Barzani has implicitly reproached on Turkey while thanking Iran in a press conference for their support against ISIS attacks by saying "Iran helped us before anybody else" (Erkmen, 2014). Besides,

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[4] On 11th of June, 2014, ISIS raided Turkish Consulate General in Mosul and held 49 personnel, including the Turkish Consul General, hostage until their release in September 2014.

only one month later, ISIS sieged Kobane this time, and Turkey displayed its reluctance in helping the Kurds once again. Hence, Turkey's credibility has decreased even further. Eventually, criticisms from international and domestic sources about Turkey's reluctance have reached to an unexpectedly high level. Therefore, Turkey was forced to fix the discrepancy between the constructed identities and its foreign policy behavior by letting the KRG forces through its borders into Kobane to aid the PYD/YPG against ISIS[5]. The possible recurrence of unstable links as such due to an incompatibility of the AKP discourse and Turkish foreign policy could damage the AKP's image and break up the alliance in the future.

To sum up, despite the few scenarios that could end up the alliance, the motives for the cooperation is stronger than the unstable links. Both sides are trying to benefit from the partnership as much as an actor could. Hence, one could call this three pillared partnership as a positive-sum alliance. In this chapter, first of all, I examined the linking and differentiation processes and identified the identities constructed by the Turkish government vis-à-vis the Iraqi Kurds. Secondly, I compared these identities with the foreign policy behavior of Turkey, to see if there is coherence. Between 2011 and summer of 2017, the AKP's discursive patterns and constructed identities, which are assigned to the KRG, are non-marginalizing, and they are in harmony with the Turkish foreign policy orientation and national interests toward northern Iraq. After June 2017, the problem that emerged after Turkey's reaction against the KRG's declaration of holding an independence referendum was tried to be fixed by the AKP by attempting to construct a new and marginal identity for the KRG President Barzani. Thus, the discrepancy between identity and policy was handled with an identity re-adjustment in order to build coherence among them, as Hansen suggested (Hansen, 2006, p. 29). In this case, we could argue that the need for creating coherence between identity and foreign policy indicates that constructed identities offer an explanatory basis for actor behavior. If the AKP continues to promote this marginalizing discursive pattern, it may have hazardous ramifications for the future of the alliance by undermining all of the positive identity constructions. Regardless, following Barzani's resignation from office, the KRG declared its interest to continue the partnership with Turkey (Rudaw, 2018). In the future, coherence between the AKP's official discourse, foreign policy implementation and construction of the KRG's identities could prevent the generation of any more unstable links, and strong criticisms from the domestic opposition or the international community.

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[5] Please refer to section 3.4 for further details and theoretical discussion regarding ISIS attacks on Kobane.

CHAPTER 3

Identity Construction and Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Democratic Union Party and People's Protection Units in Syria

3.1 Brief history of the PYD/YPG

The Syrian Kurds' modern history has similarities with their Iraqi kin. Syria gained its independence after the withdrawal of the British and French forces from its territory in 1946, and the Kurds' relations with the Arab majority were quite peaceful until the Baath Party ceased control of the government with a coup in 1970. The Baathist regime's pan-Arab ideology has denied the recognition of non-Arab minorities including the Kurds (Eliassi, 2013, p. 33), which caused a long lasting reciprocal marginalization between the Syrian Arabs and Kurds. Hence, the Kurds' rejection of joining the Arab dominated opposition forces in the recent Syrian civil war could be traced back to this historical mistrust between the Arab and Kurdish segments of the Syrian society. As a reaction, the rise of Arab nationalism in Syria also caused the Kurds to get politically organized, which was illegal at the time. In 1957, the first political organization established by Kurds was the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (SKDP) which had nationalistic tendencies (Bozkurt, 2013). In 1965, debates about whether the Syrian Kurds constituted a minority or a nation caused the SKDP to split up into right and left wing groups. The right wing argued that the Kurds were a minority and demanded cultural autonomy, while the left wing emphasized that they were a nation which should demand independence. This split has gradually triggered a series of divisions, which gave way to the establishment of 14 Kurdish parties in Syria (Bozkurt, 2013).

Most research conducted about the Syrian Kurds categorizes them into two main demographic groups. The first category of the Kurds has maintained their presence around the cities of Damascus, Homs and Hama since the Ayyubids era, late 12th century. The second category of the Kurds in Syria mostly has kinship with the Turkish Kurds and has been forced to migrate from Turkey within the last 90 years, especially after the failed Kurdish rebellion attempts of Ağrı and Dersim. Therefore, it is argued that the majority of the Kurds in Rojava have nationalist tendencies and political affinity towards the developments in Turkey, which increased particularly after the establishment of the PKK in the late 1970s (Erkmen, 2012, pp. 20-21).

In fact, the Assad government allowed for the PKK's presence in Syria to be used as leverage against Turkey in bilateral problems, such as the water dispute, through the 1980s and 1990s. Syria even provided a base for the PKK in Bekaa Valley in order to train fighters, which naturally increased the tension in its relations with Turkey. Consequently, when Turkey threatened Syria with military action about this issue, Adana Agreement was signed between Turkey and Syria in 1998 at the brink of war, and Syria accepted the expulsion of the PKK elements, including its leader Abdullah Öcalan, from its territory.

As a result of this process, the PYD/YPG was established as the Syrian branch of the PKK in 2004. Due to close cooperation between Syria and Turkey after the Adana agreement, the PYD/YPG leaders had to leave the country and move to northern Iraq (Bozkurt, 2013). However, many scholars have widely argued that after Turkey's explicit support for the opposition forces in the Syrian civil war, Syrian President al-Assad invited the PYD/YPG leaders back into Syria as a counter move against Turkish foreign policy (Gunter, 2013, p. 451).

3.2 Overview of the Syrian Civil War

Before getting started with the discussion of the findings of the discourse analysis of Turkish foreign policy towards the PYD/YPG, it is necessary to explain the complexity of the civil war in Syria. The Syrian civil war could be evaluated by using two levels of analysis, namely the domestic and international levels. There are international and domestic actors in

the Syrian civil war that play important roles in the current situation. At the international level, one could talk about two varying degrees of involvement in the civil war.

First, those foreign actors who have directly intervened in the Syrian civil war include Turkey, Russia and a multi-national coalition led by the US, which all try to change the course of the civil war in their favor. Since the beginning of the civil war in Syria, Russia has been providing weapons and ammunition support for its longtime ally, al-Assad government. In September 2015, the Russian parliament approved direct involvement in Syria after Syrian President al-Assad officially requested Russia's military assistance in the civil war, while the Russian Orthodox Church declared the campaign as a holy war against terrorism (AlJazeera, 2015). With the intense Russian air support, government forces managed to recapture many key cities from the opposition and ISIS. Also, Russian air strikes prevented the American and Turkish support from reaching out to the opposition forces as a result of which the Syrian government obtained a breathing space and considerable advantage over its rivals (Gerges, 2016). During this period, while the US and Turkey complained about Russia's attacks on the opposition forces and the civilians, Russian President Vladimir Putin followed a common discourse with al-Assad, implying that all the armed opponents were considered terrorists (McDonnell, et al., 2015).

The tension between Russia and Turkey in the Syrian context reached its climax when the Turkish Air Force shot down a Russian combat jet in November 2015. In order to prevent another confrontation with a military behemoth like Russia, Turkey was forced to back down from using the Syrian air space, which also caused the US to limit its airstrikes in Syria. As a response to the plane crisis, Russia imposed a series of economic embargoes to Turkey and started to provide military support for the PYD/YPG (NtvHaber, 2015). This plane crisis could be considered as a key event since it compelled Turkey to re-adjust its strategy in Syria, and caused Turkey and Russia to discursively marginalize each other. During this period, Russia began to identify Turkey as a supporter of terrorism by claiming that Turkey has been providing weapons for the radical Islamist organizations, and engaging in illegal oil trade with ISIS (Hacıoğlu, 2015). Erdoğan countered the allegations by denying them. Erdoğan also added that Russian air strikes have been targeting the Turkmen population in Syria, which implied that it was Turkey's duty to defend their kin (Hurriyet, 2015e). Eventually, tense relations between Ankara and Kremlin began to normalize after Turkey's apology about the plane incident in June 2016 (Diken, 2016).

With the Syrian government's use of violence against the protesters in March 2011, the US government called out for al-Assad's resignation and started imposing economic sanctions (Wilson & Warrick, 2011). The US also has been providing military training, logistics and arms support to the opposition and the PYD/YPG forces to be used against the Syrian government and ISIS. In September 2014, President Obama said the US was planning to conduct a systematic campaign of airstrikes against ISIS, and the operations started immediately (Raddatz, et al., 2014). The US formed a coalition of allied states that included Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Belgium, Canada and Turkey. Each of these states participated in several aerial operations in Syria.

Second, those countries which have been indirectly involved in Syria provide arms and logistics support for the conflicting parties who have common interests with their sponsors. Actors like Iran, Iraq, and Hezbollah of Lebanon have been supporting the Syrian regime. Also, China has aligned itself with Russia in supporting the al-Assad regime in order to prevent the Western powers from dominating the Middle East. On the other side, the coalition powers mentioned above have also been providing support for the opposition forces (Gunter, 2013, pp. 447-448).

Until the eruption of the civil war in March 2011, Turkey and Syria were in fact cooperating closely. After the war started, we have witnessed Turkey's mediation efforts between the Syrian regime and the opposition in the first half of 2011. However, the AKP government has failed to convince al-Assad to stop the violent conflict. The then Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan stated that although the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs and himself had had several meetings with al-Assad, the civilian deaths continued (Akşam, 2012). In September 2011, although Russia and China rejected the proposed sanctions against Syria in the UN Security Council, Turkey declared that it would start implementing unilateral sanctions against the Syrian government, and start supporting the Arab dominated opposition group, the SNC. Thus, Turkey's declaration signaled its alliance with the US against the Russian and Iranian presence in the region.

After 7 years of civil war, conflicting parties in Syria are still failing to reach an agreement to put an end to the war. Syrian government and opposition forces are still participating in deadly clashes. With the Russian support, al-Assad government managed to re-capture the regions surrounding Damascus from the opposition and ISIS. Also, ISIS

presence in Syria and Iraq almost came to an end as the terrorist organization lost %98 of its territory, thanks to the military persistence displayed by the KRG, the Iraqi government as well as the bilateral alliances between the US – PYD, and Russia – Syrian government.

3.3 Analysis of the relationship between the PYD/YPG and Turkey since 2011

Before the start of the Syrian civil war, Turkish political elite, media and academics tended to associate the Syrian Kurds with the PKK, mainly because of the latter's strong presence in Syria until 1998 (Erkmen, 2012, pp. 22-28). Also, the PYD/YPG's membership to the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) causes Turkey to associate the Syrian Kurds with terrorism. The KCK is an umbrella organization which consists of the PKK in Turkey, the PYD/YPG in Syria, PÇDK (Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party) in Iraq and PJAK (Kurdistan Free Life Party) in Iran, and operates under the PKK leader Öcalan's ideology of democratic federalism. Therefore, after Kurds gained the control of Kobane, Afrin and Al-Malikiyah regions from the Syrian regime in the summer of 2012, and the PYD/YPG emerged as the dominant actor of Rojava, Turkish political actors also considered this development within the framework of being neighbors with the PKK (Erkmen, 2012, p. 22). Nevertheless, the Kurdish political movement in Syria is more complicated than what Turkey initially perceived. The number of active Kurdish political parties in Syria is unclear, yet they are estimated to be around seventeen. Furthermore, twelve of these political parties are sympathizers of the SKDP, since they have their roots in the SKDP in the 1970s, which indicates Barzani's strong political influence over the Syrian Kurds (Orsam, 2012). In addition to this, those political parties which support the PYD/YPG, independent Kurdish youth organizations, as well as neutral Kurdish groups, are also present in the Syrian domestic political arena.

In addition to the above-mentioned situation, it is necessary to take into consideration many internal dynamics of Syria in order to understand its unstable civil war environment. To begin with, the ongoing Kurdish – Arab rivalry since the rise of pan-Arab ideology since the 1970s has been creating tension and distrust between the societal segments. Hence, political cleavages led the PYD/YPG to demand an ethnic based federal governance system while the Arabs strongly opposed it, and differentiated the Kurds as secessionists (Eliassi, 2013, p. 35). From this perspective, Turkey's explicit support for the Arab dominated SNC could partly

explain the Kurds' hesitation to join the opposition forces. It is no surprise that the former PYD Co-Chair Salih Muslim blamed the SNC for committing treason by cooperating with Turkey (Gunter, 2013, p. 451).

It is also difficult to talk about unity among the Syrian Kurds. While a group of Kurds and the PYD/YPG support the People's Council, the legislative body of Syria, others support the Kurdish National Council (KNC) which was initiated by the KRG leader Barzani in 2011 (Gunter, 2013, p. 447). The KNC is an umbrella organization which unifies various Syrian Kurdish groups in order to counter balance the PYD/YPG domination in Rojava. In 2011, it was rumored that behind the assassination of Mashaal Tammo, a Kurdish political activist and the leader of the Kurdish Future Movement, was the PYD/YPG. As a result, an armed conflict broke out between the KNC supporters and the PYD/YPG after Tammo's funeral and the violence was suppressed by the government forces (Gunter, 2013, p. 448). The competition to extend influence over the Syrian Kurds was always a major source of tension between the PYD/YPG and the KRG, which has prevented them to act in unity. The KRG's alliance with Turkey, and the former's pressure against the PKK to settle disputes with the latter, caused further tension between the PYD/YPG and the KRG. Accordingly, Salih Muslim believes that the Syrian Kurds will be divided due to the KRG's hostile actions (Gunter, 2013, p. 451).

Within this complicated environment, the AKP has constructed its own identity from 2011 onwards not only vis-à-vis the PYD/YPG but also vis-à-vis other actors in Iraq and Syria. As elaborated in chapter 2, self-descriptions of neo-Ottoman, non-discriminatory and humanitarian representations are frequently encountered in the Turkish foreign policy discourse toward Middle East. While the AKP has been in an alliance with the Iraqi Kurds since 2008, the AKP discourse differs significantly when its officials address the PYD/YPG. There is an observable tendency of aggression in the AKP discourse whenever the PYD/YPG is addressed. Several threats of military intervention have been made by Turkish leaders against the empowerment of the PYD/YPG over the years. For example, after the territorial gains of the PYD/YPG in Syria, in 2012, President Erdoğan said "we cannot allow for a Kurdish structure in northern Syria, and we have a right to intervene" (Milliyet, 2012). Turkish threats against the PYD/YPG presence even reached to the point of eradication of the Syrian Kurdish organization. In 2016, Erdoğan said during the Operation Euphrates Shield "our struggle will continue until the PYD/YPG is eradicated" (Erdoğan, 2016). This phenomenon is in line with the AKP's differentiation of the PYD/YPG as a terrorist organization, which is perceived as a national security threat against Turkey. Furthermore,

one can also see a consistent belligerence in Turkish foreign policy against the PYD/YPG, which involves large scale military operations into northern Syria, and several independent air strikes conducted by the Turkish air forces. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs argues that Turkey, in its military operations against the PYD/YPG, is using its legitimate right of self-defense as a response to the threat and alleged attacks coming from the PYD/YPG by referring to the 51st article of the United Nations Charter (Çoğalan, 2017).

Elaborating on the differentiation of the PYD/YPG by the AKP is necessary in understanding Turkish foreign policy against the Syrian Kurds. The PYD/YPG's marginalization by the AKP gained pace after the former's domination of the Rojava region and its unilateral declaration of autonomy in 2013 (Kayhan Pusane, 2016, p. 25). According to the discourse analysis, the AKP government differentiates the PYD/YPG's identity in two major patterns. To begin with, the Turkish government frequently describes the PYD/YPG as a terrorist organization, and the Turkish policy makers present several arguments to support this claim. Turkey's most powerful argument is the fact that the PYD/YPG was established by the PKK which is an internationally recognized terrorist organization. In an interview in 2014, the PKK leader Cemil Bayık confirmed this claim by declaring that "the PYD/YPG was established by the Kurds from the PKK" (Hurriyet, 2014). Salih Muslim's statements such as "The PKK is our brother, we apply Öcalan's ideology in Syria" (Çamlıbel, 2014) further strengthens the hand of the Turkish government. Also, it is possible to find many images in the media where the Kurdish people celebrate the PYD/YPG's annexation of Syria's Al-Malikiyah town with the PKK flags and the jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan's posters in the town square (Bozkurt, 2013). However, Salih Muslim denies Turkey's identification of the PYD/YPG as a terrorist organization by saying that the PKK and PYD/YPG are not the same, and problems between the PKK and Turkey are not the PYD/YPG's concern. Muslim also adds that Erdoğan is trying to frame the PYD/YPG as terrorists due to its achievements in Syria (Cumhuriyet, 2014).

The AKP government also argues that the PYD/YPG has carried out terrorist attacks against Turkey in recent years. For example, former Prime Minister Davutoğlu held the PYD/YPG responsible for the two bombings in Ankara, on 17th of February and 13th of March, 2016 (Davutoğlu, 2016b). However, the PYD/YPG denied the first attack in February (Durgun, 2016); while a PKK sub-group Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK) claimed responsibility of the latter (BBC, 2016b). Similarly, in July 2014, the Office of the Turkish General Staff released a statement about the PYD/YPG militants killing 3 Turkish soldiers

near Şanlıurfa. However, the PYD/YPG denied the accusations and the PKK claimed responsibility for the attack (Posta, 2014). Davutoğlu commented about the dilemma: "It is obvious that the PYD/YPG is conducting these attacks, and wants the PKK to claim responsibility so that the PYD/YPG can continue receiving international support" (Davutoğlu, 2016c). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to find out which side is telling the truth. However, these examples clearly show the Turkish policy makers make a great effort to marginalize the PYD/YPG as a terrorist organization, while the PYD/YPG strongly refuses these allegations.

In order to provide further evidence for their argument, the Turkish authorities also report the increase in the numbers of captured Syrians among the PKK militants, and the increase in illegal border crossings from the Rojava region into Turkey (Erkmen, 2012). Nonetheless, Turkey's efforts in identifying the PYD/YPG as a terrorist organization did not secure much support among the members of the international community, except for the KRG. Barzani supported the Turkish discourse by stating that the PYD/YPG and PKK are the same organization, and added that helping the PYD/YPG would mean helping the PKK against Turkey (Hurriyet, 2016b). The strong legitimacy of the PYD/YPG in the eyes of the international community is closely connected to the Kurds' effective fight against ISIS, both in Iraq and Syria, which placed them in an indispensable position in the region, and triggered donations of serious amounts of military equipment from foreign powers. Western states such as the US, Germany, Netherlands, France and also Russia have been providing the PYD/YPG weapons and ammunition (Hurriyet, 2017). The Turkish government has often expressed strong criticisms against those countries that support the PYD/YPG by arguing that the weapons given to the PYD/YPG will be used against Turkey by the PKK in the future (Ergan, 2015b). However, these criticisms have not generated any tangible effect so far.

Another major discursive pattern the AKP often uses to differentiate the PYD/YPG is cruelty. For instance, Davutoğlu once said that the PYD/YPG should not attend the negotiations in Syria, because they inflict cruelty on Kurds; they cannot represent the Kurdish people (AKP, 2016). President Erdoğan similarly stated that "Terrorist organizations like the PYD/YPG and ISIS are killing innocent people without mercy; they are cruel and worse than wild animals". In the same statement Erdoğan added "We are the descendants of the Ottomans, we have to reach for help to where we can reach" (Hurriyet, 2015d). In other words, from the stand point of the Turkish government, as a humanitarian actor, the AKP has legitimate reasons to act against the cruel policies of the PYD/YPG in order to save the

victimized Syrian Kurds and other minorities in Syria. As descendants of the Ottomans, the AKP also sees the people of Syria as part of its historical heritage which, from the Turkish point of view, provides a justified position to protect them.

Table 3 AKP's Foreign Policy Discourse towards the PYD/YPG

	PYD/YPG
Discourse	Marginalized as a cruel terrorist organization, and as a national security threat to Turkey
Foreign policy	Cross-border air strikes, and two large scale military operations

By identifying the PYD/YPG as a terrorist and cruel organization; the AKP clearly presents the Kurdish political movement in Syria as a national security threat to Turkey. Therefore, it is possible for Turkey to justify its involvement in the Syrian civil war. As Hansen emphasizes, the strength of the national security discourse is that it masks its historical and contestable nature by constructing security as an objective, dehistoricized demand (Hansen, 2006, p. 30). Turkey's securitization of the PYD/YPG's presence in Rojava changes the nature of the political debate into an objective dimension of security, where the argument is no longer considered as a political debate since it is perceived as a factual security issue. When constructing the identity of the PYD/YPG, this artificial shift in the nature of the argument allows the Turkish official discourse to neglect any challenging discourse whether it comes from domestic or international community. For instance, Turkey has been the target of criticisms by the US and Russia after its aerial attacks on the PYD/YPG targets in April 2017 (BBC, 2017). Turkish President Erdoğan responded to these criticisms with the argument that "We have 911 kilometers of borders with Syria, and we are under constant harassment and threat; no one can ask us why we are doing this" (Milliyet, 2017). Furthermore, Turkey's negligence against criticisms regarding Turkish foreign policy towards the PYD/YPG, forced the US and Russia to provide protection to the PYD/YPG against Turkish aggression (Bozarslan, 2017) (CNN, 2017). The reader can find the details of these phenomena in the next section below.

3.4 Key Events

Important developments, which are called key events by Hansen, have the potential to place themselves at the center of the political and media agenda, and influence the official policy – identity debates, or force the official discourse to engage with political or media criticism. Evaluating political debates around key events offers an opportunity to test the stability of the official discourse (Hansen, 2006, p. 28). With regard to Turkey's identity construction vis-à-vis the PYD/YPG, three key events during the Syrian civil war should be evaluated since they provide an opportunity to observe the operation of identities on the ground. The first key event is the PYD/YPG's unilateral declaration of autonomy in the Rojava region, in 2013. As discussed in the second chapter (section 2.2), the PYD/YPG's declaration was opposed severely by Turkey and the KRG, and caused them to partner up in order to contain territorial and political gains of the Syrian Kurds. Furthermore, the PYD/YPG's discursive marginalization as a terrorist organization by Turkey has gained momentum after 2013.

The second key event is the siege of Kobane. The city of Kobane is a Kurdish city in Rojava, established very close to the Turkish border, and it has been under the PYD/YPG control since the withdrawal of the regime forces from this area in the summer of 2012. Two years later, ISIS moved its forces to the North and sieged the city. The city of Kobane sits in an isolated area, and it is argued that Kobane is very difficult to capture (Erkmen, 2014). However, in 2014 the PYD/YPG did not have enough man power to defend it against ISIS. Despite the heavy air support from the coalition forces, it was argued that if the city had been lost, the PYD/YPG would not have had the capability to recapture it, and this could have helped ISIS to invade other cities of the Rojava region (Erkmen, 2014). Even though the coalition forces assisted the PYD/YPG with heavy airstrikes, they were insufficient in preventing ISIS' advance towards the city. Thus, the struggle against ISIS became a symbol for Kurdish nationalism which caused the PKK, KRG and PYD/YPG to get closer despite their political disagreements and rivalries (Kayhan Pusane, 2016, p. 25). However, the KRG's Peshmerga forces did not have direct access to Kobane from northern Iraq due to ISIS' occupation of the peripheral regions, and the only option was for Turkey to grant passage for the KRG forces through its borders which caused a strong general expectation in the

international community from Turkey to open its borders. When we look at the parties in conflict from the perspective of identity, the siege of Kobane gains an additional symbolic meaning other than Kurdish nationalism. The battle could be considered as a confrontation between a radical Islamist terrorist organization and the PYD/YPG, which is supported by the US-led coalition forces and which symbolizes the Western civilization. When such a symbolic meaning combined with the Kurdish nationalist feelings, the siege of Kobane mobilized an intense domestic and international pressure on Turkey to open its borders for the Peshmerga. Hence, Turkey's reluctance to help the PYD/YPG caused heavy criticisms at the international level, and triggered violent mass protests among Turkey's Kurds in Southeastern Turkey. Criticisms against the AKP's foreign policy eventually transformed into allegations of a possible cooperation between Turkey and ISIS. Many actors including the US, Germany, Russia, the PYD/YPG, the PKK as well as the domestic opposition made similar allegations during this period (Bertrand, 2015) (Brooks-Pollock, 2015). Turkey even was given the nickname "the jihadist highway" in the international media due to its loose border regime in the southeast which provided easy passage for the jihadist fighters (Cockburn, 2014). The Turkish government responded by identifying the allegations as collective attempts to discredit Turkey in the international arena (Davutoğlu, 2015). However, Turkey was also forced to grant passage to the Peshmerga forces through its borders, after facing fierce criticisms at both the domestic and the international environment.

Hansen argues that oppositional discourses might use new facts to destabilize the construction of identity or implemented policy, and the governments which face oppositional discourses can act on a sliding scale of decreasing responsiveness (Hansen, 2006, p. 29). First, a government might change its identity-policy construction. Second and very commonly, a government might acknowledge the facts but explain them within the current discursive framework that is already operational. Third, when it is difficult for the government to accommodate facts within the current discourse and a new policy is impossible to implement, facts are passed by in silence against heavy criticism. In the case of Turkey, the AKP government chose to change its policy in order to cope with the criticisms.

From Turkey's point of view, both the PYD/YPG and ISIS were officially identified as threats against Turkish national security. Hence, Turkish policy makers seemingly hoped to wait for two enemies to exterminate each other. According to President Erdoğan, the PYD/YPG and ISIS are perceived as similar terrorist groups (Çandar, 2014), so that it would be unconventional to expect Turkey, without showing any hesitation, to help the Syrian Kurds

who were identified as a clear threat in the face of the Kobane incident. Nevertheless, constructed identities of the AKP such as humanitarianism and non-discrimination appear to be in contradiction with the implemented policies which in turn jeopardized Turkey's reliability by creating severe allegations and criticisms. Such incompatibilities between identity and policy is likely to cause a decrease in the government's reliability which could produce unwanted electoral results in the domestic sphere, while it also could result in being alienated in the international community. That is why; actors seek to maintain stability between their identity – foreign policy constructions. Thereby, the AKP government was eventually forced to change its foreign policy by allowing the passage of Peshmerga forces to Kobane in order to re-adjust the unstable link between its discourse and foreign policy. After the siege failed, ISIS had to retreat to South, and the struggle of the Syrian Kurds was praised as an act of heroism in the international circles, which led to increased military support from the foreign powers.

The third key event is the cross border military operation in Syria, which is called the Euphrates Shield and which was conducted by the Turkish Military between August 2016 and March 2017 with the goal of clearing the region around the Turkish-Syrian border from perceived threats such as the PYD/YPG and ISIS. Only hours before the start of the Operation Euphrates Shield in August 2016, Turkish Prime Minister Yıldırım said that Turkey was facing serious threats on its borders, referring to the PYD/YPG and ISIS, and added that Turkey needed to clear the western flank of the Euphrates River in Syria (Hurriyet, 2016). Consequently, the Turkish Armed Forces conducted the operation in cooperation with the FSA. The Euphrates Shield Operation lasted for more than six months as a result of which Turkey ceased control of an area of 2015 km² wide, killed around 3000 ISIS militants and 425 PYD/YPG members (AlJazeera, 2017). I have identified this operation as a key event since it made the alliances in the region much more visible against Turkey's policies. First, the PYD/YPG has agreed with the Syrian government, under the supervision of Russia, to hoist the Syrian flag in the regions controlled by the PYD/YPG, in order to prevent the Turkish military from attacking these regions (CNN, 2017). This development also confirms the Turkish and the KRG allegations regarding the alliance between the PYD/YPG and al-Assad regime. Also, in this case, attacking a place with the Syrian flag on it would mean an indirect confrontation with Russia which might be too costly for the Turkish side. Second, after the operation, Russian soldiers were spotted wearing PYD/YPG badges on their uniforms which symbolizes that the PYD/YPG was under Russian protection (Yetkin, 2017). Lastly, on 25

April 2017, Turkish air forces conducted an attack against the YPG base in Derik, Syria and killed 20 fighters. On the same day, the US helicopters and armored vehicles started patrolling the Turkish / PYD/YPG border. Accordingly, the PYD/YPG executive of the region, Abdulkerim Omar, stated that "We do not have any agreement with the US about this situation, but clearly they are not happy with Turkey's actions" (Bozarslan, 2017). Such developments could be accepted as a sign of the PYD/YPG's increased importance for the US and Russia.

In addition, similar to Operation Euphrates Shield, Turkish Armed forces initiated another large scale military offensive, which is called Operation Olive Branch, in order to clear the Afrin region in Syria from the PYD/YPG threat in January 2018. Almost two months later, Turkish military, in cooperation with the FSA, ceased control of the Afrin town on 18th of March, but the operation is not finalized in order to secure the periphery areas. This foreign policy choice is consistent with the identities and discursive strategy constructed towards the PYD/YPG by the Turkish government. To begin with, recent news pieces indicate that Turkish discourse of identifying the PYD/YPG as a terrorist organization and a national security threat still continues. For instance, President Erdoğan criticized the US' military support for the PYD/YPG by claiming that the former was trying to form a terror army close to the Turkish border, and added that Turkey would strangle it before it is born (Wintour, 2018). Furthermore, one can also notice the persistence in the AKP's discourses of presenting Turkey as a humanitarian actor and differentiating the PYD/YPG with cruelty. As an example, the Turkish General Staff stated that the operation aims to save Turkey's friends from the oppression and cruelty of terrorist groups such as the PYD/YPG and ISIS (TRT, 2018). The ongoing consistency in the Turkish foreign policy and discourse indicates that analytical categorizations presented by this thesis are still valid. Besides, Turkey's current set of discursive practices, foreign policy behavior and constructed identities vis-à-vis the Syrian Kurds are likely to continue, as the AKP government warns about initiating another military operation against the PYD/YPG in the near future, if the Kurdish actor refuses to withdraw its forces from the region of Manbij.

From the perspective of the PYD/YPG, being identified mainly as a terrorist threat by a neighboring state, which is much bigger in every aspect, is a challenging diplomacy test. The PYD/YPG perceives Turkey as a threat to its own survival, and as the only state in the region that is capable to take back the recent political gains of the Syrian Kurds (Erkmen, 2012, p. 29). The relative difference in capabilities, limits the PYD/YPG's behaviors in terms

of acting against Turkey's interests. However, the PYD/YPG managed to compensate such limitations by engaging in an alliance with the US-led coalition forces, and also by gaining the protection of the Russian forces. The Syrian Kurds invest considerable amount of man power into the battlefield so that sponsoring powers do not need to have any casualties when pursuing their interests. In return from this proxy war deal, the PYD/YPG appears to receive protection against existential threats likely to come from ISIS and Turkey, opportunities of territorial expansion following military victories against ISIS, and international recognition as a legitimate political actor. Thanks to this multi-dimensional alliance with the West and Russia, the PYD/YPG was able to afford the declaration of unilateral autonomy in 2013, despite Turkey's threatening warnings. When we consider the Turkish discourse towards the PYD/YPG, without the deterrence of the alliance, the outcome of the Euphrates Shield Operation could have been quite pessimistic for the Syrian Kurds. Against the Turkish belligerence, the PYD/YPG has chosen a friendly discourse with Turkey. Thus, the PYD/YPG frequently presented itself as a non-threatening and friendly political organization towards Turkey, and called out for initiating dialogue many times (Radikal, 2015). However, Turkey never responded to these constructive discourses. Although Turkish authorities and Salih Muslim had a couple of meetings, these meetings never involved a high ranking Turkish official, but rather were conducted only with medium level Turkish bureaucrats (Çamlıbel, 2014b). Hence, even in those time periods when Turkey seemed open to a dialogue with the PYD/YPG, the AKP had a hierarchical perception towards the PYD/YPG. On the other hand, Turkish Prime Ministers and Presidents have met with members of the KRG cabinet several times.

In this chapter, first, the results of the discourse analysis are presented in order to show how the AKP constructed its own identity and the PYD/YPG's identity vis-à-vis each other. Second, identities and Turkish foreign policy are evaluated together to see how the official discourse seeks to establish stability between the former and the latter. According to the official discourse, the identities constructed by the AKP vis-à-vis the PYD/YPG coherently support the implemented foreign policy towards the Syrian Kurds. Turkey radicalized the PYD/YPG by securitizing its presence as a cruel terrorist organization and accordingly preferred a hardline approach against them, while the AKP government links its own identity with neo-Ottoman, humanitarian and non-discriminatory representations. Hence, these constructions of identity are apparently designed for justification of the AKP's active foreign policy in the region. The instrumental use of identities could generate a number of advantages

for authorities. From the context specific perspective, the identity of the PYD/YPG is loaded with negative aspects to be the opposite of the AKP's presented identities. Hansen suggests that domestic and international spheres are usually constructed as the opposite of each other. This radical difference has led security discourse to construct identity in terms of a national self that is in need of protection against a radically threatening other. Therefore, security is an ontological necessity for the sovereign in order to construct its own identity, and to be needed as the rightful protector of the domestic realm (Hansen, 2006, p. 30). The dichotomy of the constructed identities does not only serve to gain electoral support for the sovereign, it also serves to justify the cause of the government by rendering its struggle as a moral necessity. Thus, acceptance of the sovereign power is possible only if those who are subject to it see it as a moral necessity (Campbell, 1992, p. 74). Addressing the other with an inferior identity such as terrorists or cruel villains makes the audience of the discourse morally responsible of stopping the evil actions of the other. Turkey's efforts of linking its own identity with its differentiation of the PYD/YPG offer a simple polarization of the righteous versus evil identities. In turn, it could be argued that the Turkish discourse against the PYD/YPG also aims to minimize possible criticisms and to maximize support for the implemented policies.

When an actor defines another as an enemy, they are not likely to cooperate, and they are inclined to see their interactions as a zero-sum game[6] (Somer, 2005, p. 120). Thereby, normalization of the mutual relations of Turkey and the PYD/YPG does not seem probable in the near future with the current set of identities and discursive practices. However, Turkey has developed very close connections with the Iraqi Kurds at the other side of the border. In the final section, one can find the comparison of these actors from the perspective of Turkey and conclusion of the thesis.

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[6] In game theory, zero-sum game refers to situations in which total of wins and losses adds up to zero. Thus, winning is only possible at the expense of others.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

4.1 Summary of the Findings

This thesis examined the variance in Turkish foreign policy towards the KRG and the PYD/YPG. In order to provide a contribution to the existing studies, the thesis evaluated the links between the Turkish government's identity constructions and behavior vis-à-vis the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds since the start of the civil war in Syria, based on Lene Hansen's discursive research model. Accordingly, discourse analysis method proved to be useful in identifying the links between the constructed identities and policy, and their stability under the influence of certain key events.

As elaborated in the second Chapter, the AKP has linked Turkey's identity with 3 major patterns; non-discriminatory, humanitarian, and neo-Ottoman. The AKP preferred to construct these self-descriptions not towards a single actor or phenomenon, but towards the whole region of the Middle East. This simplistic approach is due to the high number of actors which are involved in the regional politics. These identities imply that Turkey is responsible for protecting the victims of the civil war who are perceived as a historical heritage from the Ottomans, willing to cooperate with friendly actors, and ready to engage threats that may originate from any of the actors in the region. Firstly, identity of non-discrimination is mostly used when Turkish government attempts to explain its position in the Syrian civil war, why Turkey has been supporting the opposition against the al-Assad regime, and the AKP's alliance with the KRG. A non-discriminatory discourse signifies Turkey's stance of being at

equal distance to any of the actors in the region, regardless of their ethnicity or religion. The identity of non-discrimination provides the AKP with an explanatory argument against domestic nationalist criticisms regarding their alliance with the Iraqi Kurds, and why there is an ongoing marginalization towards the Syrian Kurds which are perceived as a national security threat. Secondly, the humanitarian discourse appears to be overlapping with the policies of hosting around 3 million of refugees from Syria, protecting the minorities in Syria and Iraq by supporting certain societal groups and conducting cross border operations. Lastly, the neo-Ottoman references in the AKP discourse is often encountered. According to the AKP officials, Turkey's succession of the Ottoman Empire makes it responsible for the protecting the people who live in the former Ottoman territories since they are described as the historical heritage of Turkey. Thus, an identity construction in this way grants Turkey an opportunity to justify its involvement in the Syrian civil war.

The second chapter discussed how the AKP officials constructed the identity of the KRG, and how they linked the identities with Turkish foreign policy through discourses. According to the Turkish official discourse, the KRG has been identified as a reliable neighbor and Turkey's brother. These constructed identities are compatible with the strategic alliance in three main areas between Turkey and the KRG. During Turkey's domestic Kurdish Opening process, the AKP tried to utilize the KRG's influence over the Kurds in Turkey, yet this was not welcomed by the PKK because it was considered as a divide and rule strategy. Furthermore, Turkey's need for diversifying its energy suppliers and export markets, the KRG's need for buyers for its hydro-carbon resources motivated the two parties to cooperate in the economic field as well. Finally, the rise of the PYD/YPG after the start of the Syrian civil war conflicted with both Turkey's and the KRG's interests about maintaining influence over the Syrian Kurds, and motivated them for further cooperation in order to contain the PYD/YPG.

Between the years of 2007 and 2017, although the relationship between Turkey and the KRG was better than ever, this thesis demonstrated that the former does not always act as its constructed identities suggest. To begin with, an identified key event occurred in the summer of 2014 as Turkey hesitated to provide support for the KRG when ISIS was attacking the Kurdish cities of Erbil and Kobane. Turkish self-descriptions of humanitarianism, non-discrimination as well as being brothers of the Iraqi Kurds fell short, when Turkey did not help in the defense of the Kurdish territories. Hence, Turkey's reluctance caused heavy disappointment among the Iraqi Kurds. As a result of this incompatibility between identities

and policy, intense international and domestic pressure forced Turkey to re-adjust its foreign policy in order to open its borders for the passage of the Peshmerga forces. The re-adjustment of foreign policy managed to calm the criticisms down, yet it did very little for the trust issues of the Iraqi Kurds. It was unfortunate that the KRG prohibited its members from talking to the press about this issue, otherwise we could have learnt more about how the abovementioned discrepancy between identities and foreign policy affected the bilateral relations. Turkey and the KRG have covered up the negative criticisms and the alliance seemed to be back on track until the summer of 2017. Furthermore, in June 2017, due to the AKP's severe opposition against Barzani's announcement of holding an independence referendum on September 25, the relationship between Turkey and the KRG has deteriorated. This key event also created an imbalance with the link between identity and foreign policy. Thus, the AKP adjusted the identity construction vis-à-vis the KRG by linking its decision of holding a referendum with treason to the bilateral alliance in order to re-balance the identity – policy constellation.

By explaining these key events, this thesis argued that an actor's need for obtaining stability in the discursive link between identity and foreign policy displays the identities' explanatory capability of actor behavior. Hansen's research model focuses on mutual construction of identity and policy, and how they are linked within political discourses. If there is an imbalance in this link, the government will try to make an adjustment to recreate stability through modification of the current identity or proposed policy (Hansen, 2006, p. 26). From the perspective of Hansen's theoretical guideline, one could argue that the Turkish government attempted to modify its foreign policy in the first key event, which refers to ISIS attacks to Kurdish cities of Erbil and Kobane. Also, after the second key event, which corresponds to the KRG's decision of holding an independence referendum, Turkey changed the construction of the KRG's identity with a marginal presentation in order to establish a stable link with its foreign policy.

Table 4 Comparison of the AKP's Foreign Policy Discourse towards the KRG and the PYD/YPG

	KRG	PYD/YPG
Discourse	Non-marginal, described as a reliable brother	Marginalized as a cruel terrorist organization, and as a national security threat to Turkey
Foreign Policy	Increased economic activity, cooperation against the PKK and the PYD/YPG	Cross-border air strikes, and two large scale military operations

As discussed in the third chapter, the AKP marginally differentiates the PYD/YPG as a cruel terrorist organization who has ties with the PKK in Turkey, and inflicts cruelty upon the people who live under the PYD/YPG governance. The PYD/YPG's differentiation as terrorists is often emphasized in the AKP discourse in order to place the former at the center of Turkey's national security debates. The AKP's self-constructed identities as well as the PYD/YPG's differentiation of cruelty appear as supporting arguments presented along with the discourse of terrorism. The PYD/YPG's presentation as a terrorist security threat against Turkey's survival transforms the argument into an uncontestable, factual security issue. Hence, the perception of threat appears to be the decisive element in the official discourse which diversifies the Turkish foreign policy towards the two pro-Kurdish movements in Iraq and Syria. The economic, political, and military gains of the KRG do not constitute a national security threat for Turkey. In fact, Turkey's strategic partnership with the Iraqi Kurds consolidates and supports such gains of the KRG. However, Turkey presents the PYD/YPG's political and territorial gains as an existential security threat due to its domestic Kurdish issue. There are three explicit reasons behind the AKP's varied foreign policy towards the KRG and PYD/YPG. First, the KRG's history of political rivalry against the PKK, as well as the history of armed conflicts between them, has a role in shaping Turkey's perception towards the KRG positively. Second, the PYD/YPG's affiliation with the PKK, as its extension in Syria, predominantly shapes the Turkish perception towards a national security issue that has been originating from the Rojava region. Although Turkey often argued that the PYD/YPG is a terrorist organization and held it responsible for several terror attacks in Turkey, the PYD/YPG persistently denied these claims. As a response to the security threat and alleged, but not verified, attacks coming from the PYD/YPG, by referring to the 51st article of the United Nations Charter, the AKP identified Turkish military's operations against the

PYD/YPG as a legitimate act of self-defense which was also acknowledged by the NATO during the Operation Olive Branch in January, 2018 (Deutsche Welle, 2018). As a result, the AKP's discursive marginalization of the PYD/YPG is constructed based on perceived threats, in order to justify the precautionary policies to be followed. Finally, The KRG is about to become an important player in the oil market. The existence of rich oil resources in northern Iraq, and significant increase in trade activities in oil and other sectors between Turkey and the KRG have influenced the former's perception towards the latter positively. On the contrary, the PYD/YPG does not have any legitimate economic relations with Turkey.

Table 5 Macro–Analytic Comparison of the KRG and PYD/YPG

		KRG	PYD/YPG
Similarities	**Pro-Kurdish**	yes	yes
	Political and territorial gains	yes	yes
Differences	**Oil resources and trade activity with Turkey**	yes	no
	PKK affiliation	no	yes

In sum, the thesis showed that the divergent identities constructed by the AKP vis-à-vis Iraqi and Syrian Kurds are the main reason behind the differentiated Turkish foreign policy towards these two pro-Kurdish movements. Identities are presented by the actor as the reason why policies should be executed, but these identities are also reproduced through the policies (Hansen, 2006, p. 19). Therefore, a discrepancy between the articulated identity and implemented policy would mean the actor is challenging its own credibility and justification of its own behavior. Governments have to keep their credibility at a certain level due to concerns about electoral competition and maintaining international reputation. In order to verify the identities' impact over actor behavior, Turkish government's official discourses were analyzed and most repeated descriptions of the Self, the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds were presented along with the implemented Turkish foreign policies. Hence, the thesis demonstrated that Turkey's identity – policy constellations with regard to KRG and the

PYD/YPG have been to a great extent coherent, and when they are not, either the identities or foreign policy have been re-adjusted in order to create a sense of stability by the Turkish government. As a result, one could argue that identities have the capacity to hold an actor accountable for its own behavior, to justify and limit its actions in the given framework by the actor itself. If an actor wants to follow an irrelevant policy, in relation with its constructed identity, it has to articulate a new identity for the proposed policy or vice versa.

4.2 Directions for Further Research

The research conducted for this raised new questions for further research in several topics. First of all, an intertextual analysis of other genres could provide an opportunity to observe the construction of the identities and foreign policy orientations. One has to look for metaphors and implications of wider meanings that belong to other texts which go beyond political writings into different genres. Because of the scope of this thesis, which only includes official texts and discourses of the government as well as time limitations, made it impossible to use intertextual analysis in order to examine the roots of the discursive practices. Also, identities and foreign policy orientations of the domestic actors such as opposition parties, think tanks, and various lobbies could have an effect on official state policies. In order to have a further understanding of the policy making dynamics behind the state behavior, abovementioned domestic actors in Turkey could be taken into account, which requires conducting a discourse analysis with a much wider scope.

Furthermore, even though this thesis mainly focused on Turkey's relations with the Kurds in Iraq and Syria during the civil war in Syria, for seven years, further research could examine the last three decades closely in order to put forth a richer assessment of the actors and identities in play. We have witnessed an earlier rapprochement period between the Iraqi Kurds and Turkey after the first Gulf War in 1991, which had discursive and political similarities with the last rapprochement period that started after 2007. For example, in 1991 and 1992, leaders of both Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds started to construct each other's identities as brothers, economic activities between the two actors increased, and they cooperated by conducting a joint military operation against the PKK. However, close relations deteriorated shortly after the offensive, due to Turkey's suspicions about whether the Iraqi Kurds were cooperating with the PKK as well, and as a result Turkish policy makers started to

discursively marginalize Iraqi Kurds once again. With such similarities at hand, a longitudinal analysis based on identity theory which focuses on the evolution of identities and discourse has a chance to propose a pattern regarding the behavior of the two actors.

Finally, an alternative further research direction is the rivalry between Turkey and Iran. Iran has been competing with Turkey to gain influence over Iraq since the departure of the US troops from the latter, and has increased its trade activity with the region immensely. Although Iran has failed to draw the Iraqi Kurds on its side, Tehran has very close connections with the Shia Baghdad government. One of the main challenges for Turkey and the US is to contain the Iranian influence, and such a competition has been dangerously polarizing the region at the Sunni – Shia axis (Barkey, 2011). Polarization of societal segments could lead to conflicts based on sectarian identities. The competition to extend influence between Turkey and Iran has religious foundations in principle. Both actors seem to be trying to exploit their resonant religious identities with the various societal groups in the region. Syria and Iraq have multi-sectarian societies, as the Iraqi government is under the control of Shias, while the al-Assad regime in Syria is Alawite. There are also Jezidi, Christian and Sunni religious groups in both countries and the Kurds are mostly Sunnis. The AKP seems to be relying on the KRG to act in favor of Sunni influence in Iraq, most likely to counter the Iranian influence. In October 2016, Erdoğan's statement regarding the joint military operation against ISIS in Mosul could be addressed as an indicator to that: "But there is a major question; who will then control the city: of course Sunni Arabs, Sunni Turkmen and Sunni Kurds" (Dettmer, 2016). Both in Iraq and Syria, Turkey's support for Sunni oppositions against the governments from other sects cannot be solely a coincidence. Religious identities have an important place in Turkish foreign policy in both cases. If Sunni Muslims would come to power or have an advantageous position in these countries in future, Turkey would have a neighbor with a similar religious identity, a chance to extend its influence over the Middle East and North Africa, and a strong leverage against Iran since it is the biggest rival of the Turks in the region (Aras, 2012, pp. 48-49). Therefore, an analysis of Turkish – Iranian competition based on identity theory could help us to broadly explain the regional interactions of the actors.

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