

Reluctant Ally

After a long period characterized by close collaboration between the US and Turkey, Turkey became a reluctant ally when the fight was taken to Bagdad. Turkey's hesitance did not stem from its sympathy for Saddam or any doubt regarding its alliance with the US. Turkey had military, strategic and economic concerns regarding what a possible attack to Iraq might mean for its own national interests. Despite having no interest in the initiation of an American intervention, Turkey nonetheless felt the need to participate to make sure its interests were preserved. As such the veto of the Turkish Parliament shocked both the US and Turkish administrations. Yet as long as the US sticks to the agreed guidelines, Turkey is likely to maintain cooperative behavior.

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The history of Turkish-American relations dates back to the early 19th century. It was established when Turkey needed an ally in its struggle against the European powers during the push for Greek independence. The Sublime Port sought US assistance in an effort to counter-balance the European heavy weights and tried to purchase battleships. But to the chagrin of the Turks, the newly declared Monroe Doctrine prohibited the US from selling the naval vessels so desperately sought. Till the end of the Second World War, American interest in Turkish affairs was marginal. It did not exceed the bonds of customary commercial involvement. Turkey's political geography was of virtually no concern to the successive generations of administrations in Washington.

The turning point was the USSR Missouri's mission to Istanbul in the spring of 1946. When she anchored before the Dolmabahçe Palace on the morning of April 5th together with the cruiser Providence and the destroyer Power, it was taken as reflection of American interests in Turkey. The meaning of this event was not overlooked by anyone and Turkey became a staunch ally of the US even before becoming a NATO member in 1952. Despite occasional upheavals, cordial relations survived the Cold War. The US has always been Turkey's main sponsor in her relations with the EU, IMF and the rest of the international community. The interests of the two countries matched in Bosnia, Kosovo and even in Nagorno Karabakh. Ankara was more than willing to collaborate with the Bush Administration when Iraq attacked Kuwait in August 1990.

Ankara condemned the September 11 attacks, as did most states. The US did not need to exert much effort to persuade Turkey that Usame Bin Ladin was responsible for the attacks. Turkey has signaled clearly to the US that a convergence of interests in the fight against global terrorism exists between Washington and Ankara. Turkey, who has struggled with terrorist violence for a long time, rapidly positioned itself to help eliminate this threat. Turks sent troops to Afghanistan to join the peace-keeping force, and took over in-country command from the British. But when the fight was taken to Baghdad, Turkey became a reluctant ally. Turkey's hesitance did not stem from its sympathy for Saddam or any doubt regarding its alliance with the US. Turkey had military, strategic and economic concerns regarding what a possible attack to Iraq might mean for its own national interests. This short paper attempts to analyze some of these concerns and tries to reflect the worries prevalent among the Turkish foreign policy elite.

Problem of Legitimacy

Any intervention with regard to Iraq was likely to suffer from a lack of legitimacy. Neither UN Security Council Resolution 687 (S/RES/687), nor 1441 (S/RES/1441) gives the US the right to intervene. Article 2.4 of the UN Charter explicitly forbids states, including the permanent members of the Security Council, to use force against the territorial integrity and political independence of any country. Moreover, part C of S/RES/687 referring to unconditional destruction of all Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and ballistic missiles with a range over 150 km, also notes in paragraph 14 that the actions to be taken by Iraq would represent steps towards establishing a WMD free zone in the Middle East. Thus, without Israel's explicit nuclear disarmament it would be extremely difficult to convince Arab and Muslim public opinion, as well as the rest of the international community, that the action taken by the US would in fact be legitimate.

Such an intervention, coupled with the so-called "collateral damage", would most certainly cause an uproar throughout the region and cause instability in a number of countries traditionally friendly to the US. Despite the ruling elites' relentless oppression and opinion control measures, the repercussions of intervention would be felt all over the region. Ordinary citizens would not be able to understand the ostensible logic of American actions as long as the Palestinian problem remained unresolved and their "brothers and sisters" suffered at the hands of an Israeli "occupation army". Besides, many believe that the US has initiated a crisis with Iraq in order to hide the suffering of the Palestinians, get its hands on the oil of the country and restructure the map of the Middle East.

The foreign policy elite feared that a war could lead to more troubles than it might possibly solve. As an immediate neighbor, Turkey has no desire to see the Middle East once more destabilized with another wave of terrorist attacks or maybe even mass uprisings. Turkey does not want to be a target of suicide bombers either. Any government consenting to US intervention in Iraq and assisting its efforts would definitely need a solid legitimate excuse to do so. After all, Turkey is also a Muslim country and its politicians are accountable to their constituencies. Moreover, the Turkish public is overwhelmingly opposed to the country's participation in any war against Iraq. There have been countless demonstrations and anti-war meetings across the country. Ordinary people including academicians, union leaders and journalists showed their resentment of the war in public declarations, peace protests, petitions,

and letters. The only relief for the political class, albeit a temporary one, could be an explicit UN SC resolution authorizing use of force against Iraq.

Kurdish Problem

Despite assurances given by the leaders of the leading Kurdish groups (PUK and KDP) and the US administration on various occasions, Ankara still fears a possible disintegration in Iraq. Turkey does not trust either the US or any of its Western allies with respect to the fate of the Iraqi Kurds. US attempts to broker a deal between the warring Kurdish factions before the war only led to increased concerns that an attack on Iraq was a precursor to Kurdish independence. It was widely believed that in the event of war, it would be impossible to check Kurdish ambitions for independence. Kurdish groups were thought to be likely to exploit this historic chance once more and claim independence. Although the new state would be established on former Iraqi territory, many in Turkey believe that an independent Kurdistan would appeal to other Kurds and most probably cause instability in Turkey, too. If one takes into account the long history of the Kurdish problem and the heavy toll it has taken on Turkey, Ankara's concerns are very understandable. As tough bargains between Turkey and the US before and after the American intervention demonstrated, maintenance of the territorial integrity of Iraq is still one of the most vital matters for Turkey.

Economic Problems

Intervention in Iraq, coupled with long-term regional instability, would deal a severe blow to the Turkish economy, which was finally beginning to "fatten up" after several "lean" years and two economic crises. Long sought foreign investment could dry up and the tourism industry would suffer from the consequences of the intervention. Tourism had been growing at a remarkable pace in recent years. In 2001, it made up 13.6 % of Turkey's foreign currency earnings, and with 8.1\$ billion in revenues, it made up 5.5 of the GNP. It is very likely that this sector will be hit hard during the 2003 season. Trade with Iraq will undoubtedly experience a sharp decline as well. Promises of compensation by the US did not really satisfy the authorities in Ankara when they considered the negative outcome of previous commitments. Turkey claims that its net losses in the 12 year period following the Gulf War are estimated at around \$40 billion. Indeed, the invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent Gulf War initiated a downward spiral in the Turkish economy. The war severed direct trade

links with Iraq, reducing trade volume from \$2.5 billion in 1989 to \$122 million in 1991. The budget deficit rose by 210% and domestic inflation rose by 15%. Turkey's growth rate plunged to 0.5% from 9.5%.

The sanctions imposed on Iraq also dealt a collateral blow to the southeastern region bordering north Iraq. Before the previous Gulf War, according to reliable press reports, some 2,000 trucks crossed the border each day. The war and subsequent United Nations restrictions on the sale of Iraqi oil put tens of thousands of drivers out of work. It is widely reported that the domestic political results of the Gulf War were more bitter than the economic ones. The poor economic conditions led to a huge influx of immigrants, especially from the southeast to other parts of the country, intensified terrorist activities, effected Turkey's relations with its neighbors and slowed down the democratization process.

The volume of trade between Iraq and Turkey had finally reached \$3 billion for the year 2001, which is even higher than the figure pre-1990 figure. Any intervention in Iraq would lead to a sharp decline in these figures. Various sources estimate that the cost of an intervention to the Turkish economy would be somewhere around \$9-15 billion. Political difficulties and uncertainties have already placed a burden on the economy. The increased defense spending may become yet another obstacle to economic recovery. The Turkish government is required to operate on a tight budget that would produce a primary budget surplus of 6.5% of the GDP in 2003. Economists claim that a significant rise in defense spending inevitably creates problems of economic stabilization and resource allocation. Moreover, Turkey and Iraq had planned to sign a comprehensive trade and economic cooperation agreement similar to the multi-billion dollar deal in the works between Baghdad and Moscow. Therefore, economically speaking, Turkey had no incentive to support an American intervention without some measures of compensation.

Other Problems

In April 1991, immediately after the secession of hostilities between the US-led coalition forces and Iraq, Turkey was faced with a massive humanitarian crisis when almost a million Iraqi Kurds, fearing reprisals, fled from approaching Iraqi forces. Turkey did not want to go experience the same thing again as the three major Kurdish cities are either within the Iraqi controlled territory or are situated near the front line. In case of an intervention, authorities in

Ankara were planning to handle the refugee problem by establishing a protective shield in Northern Iraq. Such a shield would serve a double deterrence purpose. It would deter the Iraqi forces from attacking Kurds and the Kurds from declaring their independence. But forward deployment of forces was not without its problems. Such an involvement would unnecessarily risk the lives of Turkish servicemen and would certainly lead to negative reactions from international public opinion, if not from the US itself.

Although not a major concern, Turkey did not want to become a target of possible Iraqi retaliation. Turkish authorities estimated that there remained 15 medium range Scud missiles and possibly some chemical warheads in Baghdad's disposal. It is well known that over the last few decades Iraq did not hesitate to use these weapons against its enemies and against the people in Northern Iraq. Another concern was the fate of the Turkoman (Türkmen) population scattered throughout Iraq. The Turkomans in Iraq are an ethnic group speaking Turkish and with close relationships to Turkey. Population estimates of Iraqi Turkomans, although unreliable, range from between 350.000 to a few million. They are settled mostly in the regions of Mosul and Kirkouk. Turkey is highly sensitive to the preservation of the legitimate rights of the Turkomans in Iraq. In this regard, Turkey and the Iraqi Turkoman Front have called for the establishment of a Turkoman federal unit to include the cities of Mosul and Kirkouk if a permanent federal region is created. Turkey believed that in case of turmoil after an intervention, Turkomans caught between Arabs and Kurds were quite likely to suffer. As one might anticipate, the Turkoman issue was also used as a pretext for a possible Turkish pre-emptive intervention to Northern Iraq. Last but not least, Ankara did not perceive any immediate or current security threat from Iraq. Geopolitically speaking, Iraq poses a greater challenge to Iranian power rather than to Turkish.

For all of these reasons, Turkey had no interest in the initiation of an American invasion. But Ankara was very well aware that it could not resist US pressure. When the US decided to remove Saddam from power, Turkey would need to participate in order to make sure that its interests were preserved and the US stuck to an agreed plan. Turkey would not feel confident regarding the fate of Northern Iraq without its participation. Ankara had to exercise some control over developments in order to minimize surprising outcomes. Moreover, Ankara was to suffer from the economic hardships brought about by the war if it did not negotiate the compensation measures. Should war become inevitable, many in Ankara believed that Turkey could not stay on the sidelines. Turkish participation would most certainly entail the use of airbases, some harbor facilities as well as stationing of troops.

The Result

After exhausting negotiations between US and Turkish representatives regarding the terms of Turkey's granting permission to station 62,000 US troops on its soil, Ankara was able to extract guarantees with respect to the future shape of Iraq and with respect to military cooperation measures. Moreover, according to the financial package agreed, Turkey was going to get either \$ 6 billion in aid or 24 billion in long-term credit plus 2 billion in aid in order to compensate for the possible losses to be suffered during the intervention. The US was almost sure that it was going to get the constitutionally required blessing of the Turkish Parliament to use Turkish territory and airspace after the initial permission to modernize some the bases and harbor facilities on February 6. Despite worries regarding possible reactions from its own citizens and the Muslim world, the Turkish Government did not have the luxury of turning back the aid package offered in exchange for assistance. After all, many believed that the US has been Turkey's indispensable strategic partner.

Having placed complete confidence in the above arguments, the veto of the Turkish parliament with a margin of three votes on March 1st, 2003 shocked both the US and the Turkish administrations. Even pundits did not anticipate such a reaction. The shock of March 1st led to tensions and ambiguity, which in turn voided negotiations on the future shape of Iraq. Although a second motion allowing the use of airspace by allied aircrafts and even missiles passed through the Parliament on March 20, one had to wait another two weeks to pass for the initial panic to calm down. Soon it became clear that, both Turkey and the US have a common interest in regional stability and in maintaining the unity of Iraq. So long as the US sticks to the agreed guidelines Turkey is likely to maintain current cooperative behavior. The only remaining possibility which may blur relations is the prolongation of intervention with severe human suffering. As indicated above, in the final analysis Turkey is also a democratic country. Although the dictates of prudence demand strategic cooperation with the US, no government in Ankara can remain aloof regarding the demands of public opinion forever.