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## TURKEY'S IRAQ JITTERS

Throughout the long Washington debate on extending the war against terrorism to Iraq, there has been an assumption on the part of advocates of military action that Turkey would side with the United States. Turkey's anticipated support helped bolster claims that the United States would not lack bases and support in the region and the wider Islamic world when the time came. However, as we edge closer to possible conflict, it is important to look more closely at Turkey and the frequently expressed concerns of Turkish civilian leaders and military commanders about the dangers of a post-war break up of Iraq and additional economic burdens.

Turkey has been consistent in its opposition to war and its current position is that support would be given to military action only if there was "an international consensus." Nevertheless, it is likely that Ankara would ultimately consent to the use of Turkish air space and bases in a conflict. Turkey provided such backing during the 1991 war with Iraq while drawing the line on the introduction of its troops into the conflict, and Turkish leaders will be understandably wary of opposing a direct request by Turkey's main ally. However, having suffered great financial losses during and after the last war - the Turkish Economy Minister said that the figure could be as high as \$100 billion at a CSIS Turkey Project meeting last month - they will expect firm promises by the United States that assistance to the troubled Turkish economy will go far beyond Washington's indirect support through the IMF. Even more importantly, Turkey will also need assurances that its vital interests in northern Iraq will be protected.

The Turkish Foreign Minister publicly dismissed warnings by Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz during a recent visit to Ankara that a division of Iraq after military action would inevitably lead to the break up of Turkey. However, on October 11, Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit bluntly warned that the situation in northern Iraq was "out of control." Declaring "a Kurdish state has been founded in northern Iraq," Ecevit said, "we need to talk in detail about this with the United States." Ecevit was clearly reflecting the grave displeasure in Ankara over the agreement between the two Iraqi Kurdish groups in control of northern Iraq and the announcement of a constitution for a federal Kurdish region with Kirkuk as the regional capital. Two days later, Ecevit charged that the United States was "not only encouraging the Kurdish groups in northern Iraq, but actually steering them." According to Ecevit, Turkey was "being dragged into a war against its will in Iraq."

Ecevit's comments underlined earlier Turkish declarations that the establishment of a Kurdish state and the expansion of Kurdish control to oil-rich Kirkuk were *casus belli*. They also highlighted a rift between Washington and Ankara on the fate of northern Iraq after Saddam that needs to be addressed urgently. Although the United States Ambassador to Turkey, Robert Pearson, publicly repeated private assurances by American officials on Washington's opposition to an independent Kurdish state, the Turks are apparently

unconvinced. They see the statement of support by Secretary of State Colin Powell read out at the recent reopening of the Iraqi Kurdish parliament as tangible evidence of the potentially dangerous ambiguity in Washington's policies.

It is clear that the United States wants to mobilize the Iraqi Kurds, who constitute the only part of the Iraqi opposition with control over Iraqi territory, to help achieve regime change in Iraq. Knowing that the Kurds are wary of being let down again, the Bush Administration hopes to convince them that this time things will be different and that their condition will be permanently improved after a war. On October 18, Celal Talabani, the leader of one of the two main Iraqi Kurdish factions, went so far as to claim that the United States had given the Kurds "a guarantee" that it would "prevent the intervention of neighboring countries." At the same time, Washington recognizes that the prospect of imminent conflict threatens its decade-long delicate balancing act with Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds. In essence, Turkey tolerated the emergence of a de facto Kurdish entity under the protection of the no-fly zone enforced by American and British aircraft operating from Incirlik base in southern Turkey in deference to the strategic imperatives of the U.S.-Turkish relationship. However, having only recently emerged from a difficult and costly fifteen-year war against Kurdish separatism and terrorism within its own borders, Turkey is aiming to block the emergence of a greater Kurdish entity with nation state features after the planned decapitation of Saddam's authority. Turkey also intends to protect the interests of its ethnic brethren, the Turkmen.

His political opponents as well as numerous Turkish commentators have sought to downplay the importance of Ecevit's warnings as he leads a lame duck coalition government heading into crucial elections on November 3. However, there is little doubt that his views reflect the serious apprehensions of the powerful Turkish military establishment. According to Turkish press reports, a meeting last week of Turkey's political and military leaders chaired by the Turkish President, gave the military "clearance to protect Turkey's national interests in northern Iraq." The issue will be the main item on the agenda of the Turkish National Security Council on October 22. Clearly, the United States and Turkey will have a great deal to talk about during the upcoming visit to Ankara of General Tommy Franks, Commander in Chief, U.S. Central Command, and even more when the new Turkish Chief of Staff General Hilmi Ozkok makes his first visit to Washington next month.

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