

# The Middle East:

## A Turkish Perspective

Sep 11, 2002



### Brief Analysis

**T**he November 3, 2002, Turkish parliamentary elections are unlikely to produce any significant change in Turkish foreign policy, upon which there is a national consensus. The statements of all the political parties support Turkey's European orientation, and they also share a similar stance on Iraq. The new government may bring differences in style, but the same guiding principles for policymaking will remain in place.

### Iraq

Iraq has the potential to be a leader -- a source of stability and welfare -- in the Arab world. It has an educated population, vast natural resources, and a developed infrastructure. Saddam Husayn has spent \$300 billion on arms; had that money been spent wisely, it would have been a boon to the Iraqi people and to the entire region. The West's objective must be to integrate Iraq into the international community as a peaceful actor so that it can ultimately play this positive role.

In order to accomplish this, the United States, as well as states in the region, must be prepared to make sacrifices. Since World War II, Washington has established itself as a world leader in promoting concepts of governmental legitimacy, democracy, and human rights. A preemptive action against Iraq, especially taken unilaterally by the United States, would be not be consistent with the principles of such an order. But America is consulting with allies and working with the United Nations (UN), which shows that the U.S. propensity is to lead a coalition and follow the principles of international law.

Turkey hopes that issues concerning Iraq can be resolved in a peaceful manner. The Iraq problem does not require invasive surgery, because surgery will not change the onerous practices in Iraq to which all object. Instead, Iraq needs long-term therapy. The Saudi prescription consists of getting UN inspectors admitted, but this approach requires optimism about future Iraqi policy; to date, Iraq has violated nine commitments to work with inspectors. Turkey's formula for addressing this conflict lies in convincing the international community to adhere more closely to the sanctions regime. The economic sanctions imposed on Iraq have not brought the results aimed for, while Turkish trade has suffered tremendously from those same sanctions. Should the UN Security Council deem the economic sanctions inadequate, then the possibility of using the powers envisaged in Article 42, Chapter VII of the UN Charter, to which the Security Council has referred in its resolutions about Iraq, will become relevant. Article 42 sanctions action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. In the meantime, there is a lack of consensus among the members of the Security Council on whether all political and diplomatic means have been exhausted.

Turkey's principal concern in the event of a strike against Iraq is to preserve Iraqi territorial integrity. Iraq is primarily an Arab country, and Arabs would oppose the creation of a separate Kurdish state in northern Iraq at least as much as would Turkey.

The Iraqis have to decide for themselves what kind of government they want to see emerge; this is an internal issue.

That said, it is to be hoped that the winds of democracy, which blew through the central and eastern European countries, will also come to the Middle East. In this context, it is important to remember that Iraq's Turkish-speaking minority constitutes the third-largest ethnic group in the country. Turkey would be delighted if Iraq could appreciate the policies that Turkey has pursued toward Bulgaria vis-a-vis the Turkish minority there. During the communist regime, Bulgaria expelled large numbers of its Turkish-speaking citizens. Yet, Turkey encouraged those Turks who remained to be good citizens; the latter now participate actively in Bulgarian political life. Turkey has also been able to remove its military installations -- including mines -- from the Turkish-Bulgarian border. The Turkish government has no intention of meddling in the affairs of third countries, but it does have a legitimate concern for the welfare of those of Turkic origin -- if for no other reason than the possibility of refugee flow in a worst-case scenario.

#### Israel and the Palestinians

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is also a source of serious concern for the Turkish government. This conflict has been used to justify terrorist acts of unprecedented proportions, to legitimize the launching of wars, and to deflect attention from the internal ills and disorders of these societies. The basic parameters of a comprehensive peace settlement can be found in UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and in the vision of a Palestinian state. Turkey is aware that if there is a viable chance for peace with the Palestinians, Israel will choose it, and Turkey will support that peace. The United States is the driving force encouraging the parties toward peace. But at this point there is also a need to convene an international conference, which Turkey is ideally situated to host.

It is not clear what impact a strike against Iraq would have on the Arab-Israeli conflict. There is already one crisis in the region, and it is not clear if the region is strong enough to support a second one.

#### European Union

The Turkish parliament has formally approved a package of key democratic reforms to improve the country's chances of becoming a European Union (EU) member. The death penalty has been abolished. The ban on education and broadcasting in minority languages has been lifted -- a development that affects not only Turkey's Kurdish citizens, but also the many other minorities such as Bosnians, Romanians, Georgians, Azeris, and Uzbeks. As of now, Turkey waits for the EU to present a date for accession to negotiations, which would make the process of membership irreversible.

The EU has not achieved a unified foreign policy toward the Middle East. As a member, Turkey could help the EU to develop a more coherent regional policy, given that Turkey is well placed to work with the United States, Russia, and Arab states. In this context, it is interesting to note that Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors -- even Iran -- support its EU membership because they know that Turkey's EU status will provide a "window" to Europe. There is reason to hope that European and Western values have finally reached the Middle East.

◆ This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Ayca Ariyuruk.

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