

Turkey:

The Armenian Genocide Resolution and Iraq Policy

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Oct 16, 2000

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Brief Analysis

If passed, a non-binding resolution in the U.S. House of Representatives calling upon the U.S. government to recognize the "Armenian genocide" as historical fact will sour U.S.-Turkish relations at a time when bilateral ties are more vulnerable than they have been for years and when Turkish support for U.S. policies regarding Iraq and the Arab-Palestinian crisis is particularly important. Turkey, facing difficult choices regarding the appropriate "retaliatory" response to the pending House action, has already used a House committee's passage of the resolution as a pretext to strengthen ties with Iraq. Turkey's unacknowledged but implicit linkage of the genocide resolution to Iraq policy suggests that Washington may need to do more to keep Turkey solidly in the anti-Saddam camp.

Turkish Anger The resolution, which is opposed by the Clinton administration and widely perceived as an election-year gambit designed to appeal to Armenian-Americans, is scheduled to be voted on this week. Opponents continue to hold out hope it will be withdrawn. Already it has infuriated Ankara. Turks are insulted by the accusation that their Ottoman forbearers committed genocide and probably fear that such resolutions could pave the way for subsequent Armenian land and repatriation claims. Turkish military chief General Huseyin Kivrikoglu canceled a planned visit to Washington earlier this month after the House International Relations Committee approved the resolution.

Turkish political party leaders have warned that, if the genocide resolution passes, the Turkish parliament might not renew Operation Northern Watch (ONW)-- the Turkey-based, U.S.-led air operation that enforces the no-fly-zone in northern Iraq-- which is scheduled for a vote at the end of this year.

Meanwhile, Ankara has made a number of gestures toward Baghdad, even while insisting that these have nothing to do with the genocide resolution. Turkey has joined the parade of states flying aircraft into Baghdad on "humanitarian" missions accompanied by businessmen hungry for contracts. Ankara also has indicated intent to upgrade its diplomatic mission in Baghdad to embassy status; re-open a railroad line and a second oil pipeline to Iraq; and open a second border crossing. None of these would necessarily violate UN sanctions on Iraq, but all of them would ease Saddam's isolation.

U.S. Stakes Passage of the genocide resolution would create damage on a number of foreign policy fronts. First, it would complicate already difficult relations between Turkey and Armenia; indeed, it has already done so. In

response to the Yerevan government's endorsement of the resolution, Ankara has ceased granting visas to Armenians at the border. That means Armenians wishing to visit relatives in Turkey must go to a Turkish consulate in a third country to obtain a Turkish visa. (There is no Turkish diplomatic mission in Armenia itself.)

Second, sharpening of hostility between Turkey and Armenia increases tension in the Caucasus, where Turkey already strongly backs Azerbaijan against Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabagh dispute. Further problems in the region might diminish the already questionable outlook for a U.S.-favored pipeline that would carry Caspian Sea oil from Baku, Azerbaijan, to Ceyhan, Turkey, on the Mediterranean Sea.

Third, and perhaps most important, passage of the resolution could poison the atmosphere of bilateral ties by angering the Turkish public and making it more difficult for Turkey to accommodate U.S. interests in a broad range of areas, including Iraq. One such area is the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Turkey has good relations with both parties and, following Camp David, Turkey was among the states urging Arafat not to make a unilateral declaration of independence. Washington will want Ankara to continue to adhere to that position in the weeks ahead.

Thanks to its location and pro-Western leanings, Turkey has emerged as a crucial post-Cold-War ally for the U.S. in virtually all of Turkey's surrounding regions, including Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus/Caspian, and the Black Sea. But vast improvement in U.S.-Turkish relations in recent years is rooted mainly in Turkey's role in containment of Iraq and, reciprocally, in the near-unwavering backing the U.S. gave Ankara on a trio of issues: opposition to the Kurdish separatist PKK, support for Turkey's EU candidacy, and the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project. With the PKK now largely defeated, with Turkey having achieved EU candidacy, with the prospective realization of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project in doubt, and with U.S. foreign aid to Turkey having ended in 1998, the U.S. now has significantly fewer levers of influence over Ankara. Thus, for some time to come, Ankara would be less likely to respond positively to U.S. foreign policy initiatives if it is piqued by passage of the resolution.

Ankara's Options Part of the sting of the resolution, should it pass, has been preemptively eased by the fact that senior officials of the Clinton administration have worked hard to defeat it, as acknowledged by Turkish officials. Moreover, Turkey continues to value support from the administration, which Turkish leaders (unlike most of the Turkish press and public) recognize is distinct from the Congress.

Because of its close diplomatic and security ties to the U.S., Turkey probably cannot take any action severely damaging to U.S. interests without harming its own interests. This principle would apply to the two most widely discussed forms of retaliation: an embargo on U.S. weapons manufacturers and cancellation of Operation Northern Watch. Turkey's arms inventory is based mainly on U.S. equipment. That makes an arms embargo highly unlikely, though some contracts could be lost. It is doubtful that Turkey would terminate ongoing negotiations for U.S. helicopters, which the Turkish military has long coveted.

ONW is vital to U.S. efforts to contain Saddam and, through Ankara's participation in a high-priority U.S. policy initiative, it has given Turkey unprecedented influence in U.S. foreign policy. Were Ankara to cancel ONW, Turkey certainly would incur Washington's anger and, more important from the Turkish viewpoint, Turkey's geostrategic importance to the U.S. would sink significantly. Although Ankara already may have achieved its most immediate aims regarding the EU and the PKK, it knows it is likely to need Washington's political support again in the future. Given the strategic logic of preserving ONW as a factor binding the U.S. to Turkey, it is doubtful that a vengeful Turkish parliament would vote to cancel it when it comes up for renewal at the end of the year. Parliament is regularly guided by the advice of the foreign ministry and the military on national security issues, and those two bodies almost certainly will recommend continuation of ONW.

Turkey, nevertheless, well might take actions that hurt less-than-strategic U.S. interests if the resolution passes. For example, it might choose to spurn some U.S. bids on arms sales and other types of contracts or follow through on its

non-sanctions-busting threats to increase its political and economic ties with Saddam Hussein. It might also briefly limit ONW operation, as a symbolic measure. But any boycott of U.S. arms manufacturers would probably be of limited duration, and any move toward building ties with Saddam would be limited in scope. Turkey is exasperated with the effect sanctions have had on its own economy, and it fears the emergence of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq if the Iraqi regime crumbles. Ankara would not lead the way in openly flouting UN resolutions, however. The danger for U.S. interests is that Turkey would take actions to ease Saddam's isolation. In normal times, Turkey would be loath to take such actions for fear of a negative U.S. response. In the aftermath of a genocide resolution, however, the U.S. administration would be ill-placed to complain about Turkey's bruited overtures to Iraq.

Recommendation The controversy over the resolution, and the nature of the Turkish response, has called attention to a significant defect in Washington's efforts to maintain the anti-Saddam coalition: failure to take sufficient account of the economic hardships imposed on neighboring Turkey by ten years of embargo on Iraq.

Prior to August 1990, Iraq was one of Turkey's leading trading partners. Loss of that market has hurt Turkey, particularly in the Kurdish-majority southeast--Turkey's poorest area, which borders Iraq. In part to address that problem, Washington has turned a blind eye to the small amounts of Iraqi oil Turkish trucks bring back from Iraq.

But the U.S. should take more significant action to compensate Turkey for its troubles. One possibility might be incentives for U.S. businessmen to invest in Turkey, for example, by designating Turkey's southeast a zone from which joint American-Turkish enterprises could export duty-free to the U.S., as Prime Minister Ecevit once suggested. Second, the U.S. could propose beginning negotiations on a free-trade agreement with Turkey, as proposed last year by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Third, working through the UN Security Council, Washington should support re-opening the second Iraqi-Turkish pipeline and insist that Iraq use it for "oil-for-food" exports. That could add some \$250 million per year to Turkish coffers. Lastly, the U.S. should consider helping to finance the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, which the administration has repeatedly called strategically important to U.S. interests; without U.S. financing, the project likely will not be realized. Even if the House does not pass an Armenian genocide resolution, some action demonstrating Washington's recognition of the difficulties sanctions have imposed on Turks and its willingness to provide meaningful compensation will likely be necessary. Otherwise, Turkey may slide completely into the France-Russia camp devoted to chipping away at Saddam's isolation.

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